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# FAMILIAR FAILURES

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CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL, D.D.

BY REV. CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL, D.D.

FAMILIAR FAILURES

SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

SERMONS ON NEW TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

SERMONS ON BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

MORE SERMONS ON BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

THE MODERN DANCE

THE VILLAGE TRAGEDY

# FAMILIAR FAILURES

BY

CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL, D.D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH, SOUTH MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

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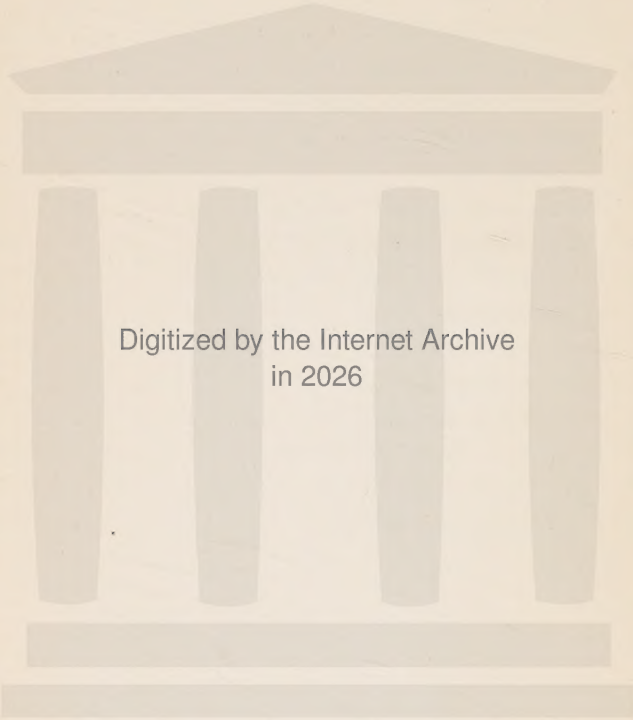
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## FAMILIAR FAILURES



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## I

### THE IDLER

*Matthew 12: 44*

“He findeth it empty.”

Empty, that is this man's tragedy. His hands are not soiled. They are not full of filth. They are empty hands. This man has just passed through a great experience. Once he was a demoniac, but the evil spirit has been cast out of him. But he allows his cleansing to result in a greater foulness. He has been set *free* but he allows his freedom to end in a more bitter and hopeless bondage. And this he does, not by filling his hands with the unclean, but by permitting them to remain empty.

“He findeth it empty.” Why did this cleansed man remain an idler? I am not going to assume that his idleness was born of sheer laziness. There are doubtless those of whom that charge is true. Nor did he remain idle because there were not worth-while tasks at which he might have toiled. Those empty hands might have been filled to overflowing with good and beautiful deeds. Nor do I think he remained idle through utter indifference. I rather take it that he was possessed by a fatal misconception of what it means to be a Christian. He had no right understanding of what sainthood

involves. He was, perhaps, eager enough to reach the worth-while goal. But he set about it in such a fashion as to make success impossible.

## I

His first blunder was in thinking that harmlessness is holiness. He confused emptiness with saintliness. He thought that goodness consisted in doing no wrong. He thought that a Christlike character was made up of negatives. He fancied that you could add a column of ciphers and that the sum total would be a heroic saint.

His mistake is a very common one. How many there are whose one great satisfaction is in the fact that they are doing no harm. They are living in daily expectation of growing a pair of wings because there are so many ugly things that they do not do. The list of the sins of which they are not guilty would make a small dictionary. But the list of the burdens they are carrying, of the useful tasks that they are undertaking for others, this would be so small that it would be an utter blank.

In all frankness, I know of no one who is further from being a Christian than the man who simply does no harm. The bee is not to be prized only when it does not sting. It is entitled to respect because of its honey. But for this the drone would be a far greater success. A garden is not a treasure merely because of its lack of weeds and briars and nettles, but because of its fruits and flowers. The value of a rose bush is not measured by the fewness of its thorns, but by the wealth and beauty of its roses. If to do no harm is to be a saint, then you might make a St. Paul out of a wax figure or a Susanna Wesley out of a rag doll.

But this fatal misconception is one that somehow refuses to die. It is very old and very new. It worked endless harm among the Jews long ago. When Jesus came, he found the religion of His people to be, in a large measure, a religion of don'ts. The big word to them was "thou shalt not." Therefore the Master told them that they bound heavy burdens on men, grievous to be borne. There were so many thousand things that one could not do that the best candidate for sainthood must have been one who was at once deaf, dumb, blind, and maimed.

Take the matter of Sabbath keeping. There were so many things that they could not do on the Sabbath that a man must have been a great scholar to be able to enumerate them all. For instance, one was not allowed even to catch a flea on the Sabbath. To engage in such practice was to be charged with the crime of desecrating the Sabbath by hunting. What a picnic those pests must have had on that day! So when Christ came one Sabbath and lifted the burden off the stooped shoulders of a woman who had been bowed down for eighteen years, the religious leaders were outraged. On another Sabbath when He lifted a man to his feet who had lain in the way of human progress for almost half a century, they determined to hound Him to His death.

It was this same misconception that gave rise to monasticism. During the Dark Ages, you remember, when a man made up his mind that he would be a saint, he ran off and hid himself in a monastery or in some den or cave of the earth. Here he often lived a life of sanctified selfishness. The evil thus wrought was twofold. The world lost the needed light that this earnest man might have brought. The man himself lost the strength and power that might have come through the

giving of this needed light. It was this that helped to make the Dark Ages dark. We always make the night blacker when we forget that it is our duty not only to be good, but also to do good.

## II

Not only does emptiness fall short of holiness, but emptiness is sin. It is possible, I know, for one to be very busy and yet be very lacking in Christian character. It is possible for one to bestow all his goods to feed the poor and give his body to be burned and yet be nothing profited. But while a worker may be lacking in moral worth, an idler is absolutely sure to be so. This is true for the simple reason that idleness is sin. James makes that very clear. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." That is, no man can stand in the midst of a needy world like ours and do nothing to meet those needs without being guilty in the sight of God.

This truth is enforced over and over again throughout the Bible. The curse uttered against Meroz was not because of any evil done, but because of the good left undone. It received especial emphasis in the teachings of Jesus. He once cursed a fig tree into eternal barrenness. This He did not because it bore poisonous fruit, but because it bore none at all. He told the story of another fig tree that was destined to be cut down for no other reason than that it refused to give an account of itself in terms of fruit. He taught that every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is to be hewn down, that every branch that does not bear fruit shall be taken away. That is, in order to be lost, it is not necessary to do positive wrong; it is only necessary

to be useless. It is not necessary to be a curse; it is only necessary to refuse to be a blessing.

This same lesson is taught in the parable of the talents. Why was the man with one talent thrown out into the dark? It was not because he had wasted his talent in riotous living. It was not because he had used it to pervert justice. It was not because he had invested it in the doing of any form of evil. Nor was he condemned because he had lost his talent. He had not lost it. He had it in his hand intact. His condemnation grew out of the fact that he had not used his talent at all. He had wrapped it in a napkin and hidden it away. He had allowed it to remain idle. Therefore he lost both his talent and himself.

In fact, I do not recall a single parable where the condemnation pronounced by Jesus is against the man who has done some positive and hideous wrong. It is always against him who has failed in his duty. The man who was cast out of the wedding feast was not accused of murder. His only fault was that he failed to don the wedding garment. The five foolish girls in whose faces the door was shut were left out in the dark, not because of some ghastly sin, but because they had no oil. The sentence of doom that the Judge is going to pronounce is not: "Inasmuch as ye have done this wrong or that wrong." It rather runs like this, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me." That is, to live in the midst of men and women that are hungry and thirsty and lonely and yet be empty-handed and empty-hearted is to shut the door that leads to Life in our own faces.

The other day, I am told, there was a young couple attending the theater. They were engaged to be married. Suddenly there was a burst of smoke near the

stage and a cry of fire. The young lady naturally turned to the man she loved for direction and help in her hour of danger. To her amazement she found that he had gone. A few blocks away he drew up, panting, thought of the girl of his dreams, and turned back to see what had happened. The fire was out. The show was in progress once more. He slipped in and seated himself again beside the girl he had forsaken. She heard him come. She knew he was by her side. But she gave him no recognition. The engagement was broken and they went their separate ways. Why? Not because he had set the theater on fire. His failure was that, in the presence of danger, he did nothing but run away.

## III

Not only is emptiness sin, sin of omission, but it leads to positive sin. There are many things that you may count impossible, but the most impossible thing I know of is to make a success of keeping a clean house that is at the same time an empty house. Emptiness invites occupation. Nature abhors a vacuum. The man who sets out to be a Christian but thinks only of the things he is not going to do is foredoomed to failure. To take such a course is to hang out a flaring sign "To Let" upon your front gate. Every demon that passes by will surely ring your doorbell and turn the doorknob and go in. The surest way to cease to be good is to fail to be good for something.

The young men and women that are going wrong to-day—when do they begin? When do they take their first step down? When they are busy? When they are hard at work? No. It is when they are idle. If you might know the soul history of those who have made

shipwreck of themselves, you would find that these failures had been made largely during the hours of idleness. The devil is an ingenious schemer. He seeks admission into every life as insistently as water seeks admission into a boat. Every vacancy invites him. To refuse to be positively good is to end by being positively bad.

“ ’Twas not in the day of battle that we threw away  
the sword

But in the lonely hours of watching at the river by the  
ford.

The waters lapped, the night winds blew,

Full-armed the fear was born, and grew,

And we were flying ’ere we knew, from specters in  
the night.”

## IV

What then is the cure for emptiness? There is only one cure, and that is fullness. There is only one way to conquer any evil, and that is by the bringing in of its opposite. If you are sick, the wise physician does not shut the door and close the windows and pull down the blinds and try merely to kill the disease. That was the old method. But the modern physician is far wiser. He opens the windows and lifts the blinds and seeks to build up the patient. If he can do this, he knows that he can depend upon the patient to kill the disease. That is, he recognizes the fact that the only sure foe of sickness is health.

What are we to do with all the error and false teachings that are abroad to-day? “Demolish them. Destroy them utterly.” That is the answer of those who are more pugnacious than wise. “Displace them with

the truth," is the answer of him who has greater wisdom. There is no sadder mistake being made by many earnest men and women to-day than that of trying to save the Gospel by fighting the other man's viewpoint. You cannot drive out darkness with a club. The only real foe of darkness is light. The only sure way to destroy error is by the proclamation of the truth. If you could destroy every false faith in the world, you would yet do nothing and less than nothing unless you should give a positive, true faith in its place. But on the other hand, if you succeed in giving that which is true, then you need not concern yourself in the least about that which is false.

This is a lesson that Christ taught in his story of the tares. How are we to get rid of the tares? They are growing all about us. They are growing also in the garden of our own hearts. "Pull them up," is the method suggested by the servants. And mark you, that is the method that commends itself to a great many. Tare-pulling is often a very thrilling and spectacular performance. It sometimes wins great applause from the balcony. But it usually ends in failure. Therefore, the Master warns against it. "Let both grow together," He says, "until harvest." If you pull up the tares, you may pull up wheat too. It is better to have wheat with some tares than to have a barren waste. That is, center your attention upon the wheat and not upon the tares. Let your program be positive rather than negative.

Paul spoke to the same purpose. One day he was writing a letter to a virile and semi-barbarous tribe in Galatia. They had recently been converted to Christianity. But they were finding it difficult to practice the strict religious self-control that their religion de-

manded. Their blood was hot. Blazing passions raged within them. The flesh clamored for the satisfaction of its lusts. Therefore their father in the faith is telling them how to win. What does he say? He does not say "compress your lips and square your jaw and determine that you will do no harm." This is his recipe. "This I say, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

This is the way of conquest, and there is no other way. You remember the old story of how the sirens used to sing along the rock-bound shores of Greece and Italy? Ships were lured upon the rocks by those bewitching creatures. They were said to toy with skulls of men. According to the popular conception, there was but one hope of escape for those who would pass that way. Every sailor must have his ears stuffed with wool so he could hear no sound at all. But this was a rather poor remedy. It was poor because it was purely negative. It not only prevented the hearing of that which would harm, but it was equally successful in stopping the ears to that which would help.

Now the method employed by Ulysses was far better. When he prepared to make this dangerous voyage, he did not provide himself with a supply of wool. On the contrary, he took on board with him that famous singer of antiquity named Orpheus. So winsomely was he able to sing that it was said that even the trees and the rocks were brought under the spell of his magic music. Therefore, when the ships neared those enchanted shores and the sirens began to sing and the prows of the ships began to turn toward those haunts of death, Ulysses was not afraid. He ordered Orpheus to strike his harp. As he did so, the music on board was so much sweeter than the songs of the sirens that

the sailors became utterly unconscious of the music that was meant to lure them to death.

We too are voyaging, every one of us. The shores along which we sail have many dangers. There are many voices that call to us. Some of these are full of lure and enchantment. The call of the world is strong and insistent. How shall we resist? How can we hope to win? We cannot hope to do so by merely stopping our ears. We cannot do so by simply being emptied of sin. We must be filled with the Spirit. Then we shall have a satisfaction that the world cannot give. Also our hands must be full of tasks that are large and worthwhile. It is then and then only that we shall lose our eagerness to grip what is low and worthless. It is then and then only that we shall resist the lure of the second best. Happy is the man who can answer to all voices that call to him to descend, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

## II

### WANTED: A LIAR

#### *I Kings 22:8*

“... but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.”

This is an exceedingly human story. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, is paying a visit of state to Ahab who is King of Israel. Ahab has made up his mind that this visit affords a good opportunity for him to enlist the aid of the King of Judah in the capture of Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat is not averse to joining in the enterprise, but, being a religious man, he desires to know the will of God in the matter before setting out.

To this Ahab makes not the least objection. In fact, I think he had expected it and had thoroughly prepared for it ahead of time. Therefore, he calls his prophets, about four hundred in number, and puts to them the question of the hour—“Shall I go up to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?” The answer is at once prompt and unanimous. “Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the King.” But for some reason Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with this answer. There was that in the very bearing and attitude of these prophets that excited his distrust. He was impressed with the fact that they were more interested in pleasing the King than in pleasing God. They were more eager to speak the popular thing than to speak the truth. Therefore Jehoshaphat asked this very pointed ques-

tion: "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may inquire of him?"

It seems that the unbelief implied in this question would have offended Ahab, but such was not the case. Instead he answered with surprising frankness, "There is yet one man Micaiah, the son of Imlah, . . . but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." This answer is a clear confession on the part of Ahab of at least three facts.

First, it is a confession that he does not believe in his own prophets. No doubt he would like to believe in these four hundred subservient creatures who are bent on pleasing him, but in spite of his own eagerness to believe and in spite of their high claims, he thoroughly distrusts them. Second, this answer is a confession of his faith in Micaiah. In spite of the fact that he hates this prophet of the Lord, he cannot withhold his confidence in him. Third, by this answer he confesses that he prefers those who are false to one who is true. That is, his supreme requirement of the prophet is not that he speak the truth, but that he speak what the king desires to have spoken, even though it be a lie.

## I

Now it so happens that Ahab is not the only man that likes to be lied to. That is a trait that belongs to almost all of us. By this I do not mean, of course, that there is not that in us to which the truth appeals. If such were not the case, preaching would be an utterly hopeless task. But in spite of this, the lie has its appeal. From generation to generation multitudes listen to it with eagerness and with enthusiasm.

1. One reason for the popularity of the liar is that

he flatters us. He compliments us recklessly and we like to be complimented. I make that confession for myself. You like to be complimented, too. If you say that you do not, the only difference between you and me is that I am telling the truth about it. Of course we like our compliments given wisely and tactfully. We like to believe that they are given sincerely. But we like them so well that none of us scrutinizes them too closely to altogether kill their delicious flavor.

Now I used to have a friend who declared that he did not like to be complimented. He made his boast that he lived above the possibility of being flattered. But one day there came a young book agent who was aware of this gentleman's aversion to all flattery. He got into his office and told him frankly that the one characteristic he admired about him above all others was the fact that he could not be flattered. The outcome of the interview was that the gentleman puffed up with delight and bought the book.

2. Next, the liar appeals to us by strengthening us in our decisions to do as we please. Ahab had already made up his mind that he was going up to Ramoth-gilead regardless of whether the Lord approved or not; nevertheless he enjoyed having somebody tell him that his course was wise and well chosen. It is always a delight to advise with the friend who is wise enough to tell us that the course which we have decided to pursue is, of all others, the right one. We like to be strengthened in our determination to go our own way.

3. Not only does the liar strengthen us in our decision to do as we please, but he helps us to be comfortable while we are doing it. It is not possible to be entirely comfortable while we are doing what we know to be wrong. Genuine restfulness in sin is an impos-

sibility. "There is no peace, sayeth my God, to the wicked." But the man who can make us as comfortable as possible while we are going our self-chosen way has his appeal. Of course he is a menace. He makes it easier for us to continue in sin. But in spite of this there are always those who like to have some one say, "Peace, peace," even when there is no peace.

## II

But, though Ahab preferred a prophet who was a liar to one who told the truth, yet he did not refuse the request of his friend, the King. He dispatched a servant to bring Micaiah before them. This servant evidently wanted the prophet to keep out of trouble, therefore he said, "The King's prophets speak good with one voice. You do the same; there is no use antagonizing him. He is going to do as he pleases anyway. All you can do by speaking the truth is to get yourself into trouble." Micaiah's answer is just as timely to-day as it was when he uttered it. He gave in a sentence what I conceive to be the whole duty of the prophet of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. What was he to do in his situation? What is the prophet of to-day to do? What is my business with you?

I am not here to abuse you. I am not here to bemean you or to say unkind and critical things about you. My reason for not dealing in abuse is not because such a course is altogether unpopular. It is not. I have seen audiences that liked to be abused. There are always those, who, however hard hit they are themselves, get some real comfort out of it because they believe that the man beside them is getting it worse than they are. But it takes neither heart nor brains nor courage to

abuse a congregation. And, so far as I have been able to see, it does no abiding good.

Neither is it my primary business to entertain you. Now I ought to be interesting; in fact, I must be interesting if my message is to be of any real help. There are few sins of which the preacher is guilty that do more harm than the sin of being uninteresting. What I say may be as true as the Sermon on the Mount and as fundamental as the Decalogue, but if nobody is listening, I might as well be making mud pies. I am wasting my time and yours too.

Because this is true, I simply must hold your attention. And that is not always easy. The preacher to-day is preaching to about the most difficult audience that the world has ever seen. You have had all the thrills. You have engaged in almost every sensational amusement. You have seen about all that is to be seen. Therefore it is not altogether easy to hold your attention. A sermon that would have produced a profound sensation in the days of our fathers would put you into a profound sleep.

But while the preacher must be interesting, while he must compel attention, the interest he awakens is not an end in itself. The preacher must be an entertainer but he must be far more. If he looks upon being entertaining as an end in itself, then as a preacher he is an utter failure. He is to seek to be interesting with one single purpose in view and that is to get his message across to his audience. He is to so speak, if possible, that the most listless man in his audience will be compelled to know and understand something of the truth of which he speaks.

If it is not the preacher's business primarily to entertain, no more is it his business to compel his hearers

to accept his message. He should go as far in that direction as he can. But compelling is beyond his power. He can compel no man to accept the truth. Jesus Christ Himself cannot. All He can do is to stand at the door and knock. If you will not open the door, if you will not give hospitality to Him who is the Truth, then He must remain without forever.

What then, is the business of the preacher? This prophet of old stated it in a sentence, "As the Lord God liveth, what the Lord sayeth unto me, that will I speak." That is, this prophet was to speak the truth as the Lord gave him to see the truth. That is my business. That is the business of every preacher. I am not here to say the popular thing. I am here as God's messenger. I am here to speak the truth as He gives me to see the truth.

### III

With this conviction, Micaiah came before the King. He told him plainly that the enterprise was going to end in disaster. He let him know that the Lord was not with him in his undertaking. He was on the wrong road, therefore he was destined to end at a wrong goal.

What response did Ahab make?

1. He became angry at the prophet and shut him in prison. That was very foolish. To take such a course was to assume that the prophet made the truth that he spoke. If what Micaiah said was not true before he said it, certainly his saying it would not make it so. When Galileo startled the world by saying that the earth moved about the sun instead of the sun about the earth, it was not his saying it that set the earth in motion. Nor did the earth stop revolving when he, for the moment, was

compelled to retract. When Columbus declared that the world was round, it was not his declaration that made it so. When Newton discovered the law of gravitation, he did not set that law in operation. Paul declared that what men sowed they reaped. He did not thus institute something that was new and revolutionary. He declared what was true from the beginning, whether that truth was ever uttered or not.

Then, the king's course was foolish, because he assumed that he could change the truth into a lie by locking up the man who uttered it. While driving my car a few months ago, I heard a distressing pounding inside the motor. I discovered that I had burned out a bearing. I discovered further that the oil had given out. The oil gauge registered "empty." But all I had to do, according to Ahab, was to take my monkey-wrench and smash the oil gauge.

No, something more was required than that. We cannot cure a burning fever by throwing the thermometer out the window. If you are overweight, you cannot reduce by wrecking the scales. Some months ago a kind policeman asked me to draw up to the curb. He declared that I was going a bit beyond the speed limit. What was worse still, my speedometer agreed with the policeman. But I did not undertake to remedy the matter by wrecking my speedometer. Such remedies never work. If a thing is true, it remains true whether you throw mud at the man who utters it or whether you crown him.

When Naaman came to see the prophet Elisha, the prophet told him how he might be cured of leprosy. But Naaman had his own ideas about the matter. He had made up his mind that the prophet was going to come out and strike his hand over the place and cure

him in that fashion. Therefore, when Elisha told him to go dip in Jordan seven times, it angered him. The story says that he went away in a rage. But his anger did not cure his leprosy. It never does. If what the preacher tells you is true, it remains true whether you accept it or not, whether you go away rejoicing or go in a rage.

2. Not only did the king resent the prophet and lock him in prison, but he went on in his predetermined course. He tried hard to believe in the lies that had been told him by his false prophets. But he could not fully believe them. Fear dogged him. Evil forebodings began to make him wretched. He decided that it would be wise for him to disguise himself before he entered into battle. This he did. No one who saw him suspected that he was a king.

But even this disguise could not change the truth into a lie. The day wore on. At last a certain man drew a bow at a venture. There he is, a common soldier. Possibly he has only one arrow left. He fits it upon the string and shoots at no particular target, but a man over there in a chariot clasps his side and slowly bleeds to death. See the dogs lapping up that blood by the pool of Samaria? It is rich royal blood. It is the blood of Ahab. Thus the career of this lover of lies ended in ruin.

### III

#### THE FAULTFINDER

*Matthew 7:1*

"Judge Not."

#### I

"Judge not." This is not a bit of good advice to be considered. It is a command to be obeyed. Just what does Jesus mean by this word? I do not take Him to mean that He forbids our forming an estimate of the moral worth of those about us. He does not mean to prohibit us from coming to a conclusion as to the good or bad character of our fellows. He is not calling upon us to shut our eyes to facts or to stop our ears to voices that we know to be true. He knows that it is both inevitable and necessary that we come to some conclusion as to the good or evil characters of those with whom we associate day by day.

Christ came to such conclusions Himself. He did not pass compliments upon all people indiscriminately. He did not go about giving words of praise to every one He met. There were some that He lashed with the sword of His mouth. He called some a generation of snakes. He called others whited sepulchers. There were those for whom he could not find words sufficiently scathing and bitter. And He did not hesitate, in the white heat of His indignation, to express His wonder how these so condemned could escape the damnation of hell.

In the passage before us, our duty to properly estimate the character of those with whom we have to deal is implied. "Cast not your pearls before swine, neither give that which is holy unto the dogs." But how are we going to avoid this unless we come to some conclusion as to who is swinish? How can we obey this command unless we distinguish those who are dogs from those who are not? "By their fruit," Jesus declared, "ye shall know them." Over and over again He states and implies the necessity of our forming accurate estimates of the moral worth of our fellows.

What, then, does Jesus forbid? He forbids what we are accustomed to call faultfinding. He is warning us against the sin of seeking for the worst in our brother instead of seeking for the best. He is not forbidding us to form just judgments, but judgments that are harsh and unjust and unbrotherly. "Do not," He says, "allow yourself to become a seeker after the worst. Do not cultivate the habit of looking solely for that which is to be condemned." This He commands because He knows that if we fall into this habit we shall not judge justly, but shall judge unjustly. He is trying to warn us against one of the most common and one of the most hurtful sins of the day—the habit of finding fault.

## II

What is the evil of this habit?

1. It is blinding. The faultfinder forms no just and accurate estimate either of his brother or of himself.

(1) Such a habit so blinds us as to make impossible a right estimate of our brother. This is true because those who seek for the worst find that for which they seek. It is true here as elsewhere that "he that seek-

eth findeth." And just in proportion as you center your attention upon what is wrong, you fail to see what is right. Just in proportion as you magnify the faults of your brother, in the same proportion do you minimize his virtues.

For instance, if I wanted an accurate estimate of a certain landscape, I would not send a vulture to make that estimate. He would not be seeking the best, he would be seeking only the worst. Therefore, he might fly over fields that were ribboned by rivers, hills that were decorated by waterfalls, and gardens that were colorful with flowers; but all that he would have to report when he returned would be that there was a piece of carrion lying under a certain thorn bush. He would miss all but this because it was this and this only that he was seeking.

London is a marvelous city. It is wonderfully rich in historic interest. But if I wanted to learn of this great city I would not seek information from that famous Pussy Cat. You remember her report:

"Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been?

I've been up to London to look at the Queen.

Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, what did you there?

I frightened a little mouse under her chair."

"But how about the London Tower, with its crown jewels and its heroic and bloody memories? How about Buckingham Palace? How about the House of Parliament? How about Westminster Abbey, that poem in stone, with its memorable dead? And the Queen, what of her? Was she gifted and gracious and charming?" There is absolutely no information on any of these questions. The Pussy Cat saw nothing

except a mouse. And why only a mouse? Because that was all that she was seeking.

A similar situation often develops when you attend a religious service. One Sunday you came to church. The singing was excellent. The Scripture lesson was a gem. But the preacher said something in the course of his sermon that you did not like. Of course he also said a score of things with which you were in perfect agreement. However, you had no ear for these. Your sole interest was in that of which you did not approve. Hence you went away and thought only of that part of the sermon. Of that part you spoke to your friends. Finally to ease your conscience you wrote that preacher an anonymous letter about it. And why was this? Because you were seeking for the worst, and seeking for that, you found the worst and that only.

Now, suppose you had invited me to your house for dinner that same day. Soon after we reach your home dinner is served. We take our places at your well-filled table. There are fried chicken and a dozen other things that I like. But right at my side is a dish of lovely tomatoes. Now it so happens that I do not like tomatoes. For this reason I refuse the chicken that I do like and the ice cream and the roasting ears, and I make my meal solely off the tomatoes. Then I go home and complain of the pooriness of the dinner. What is the matter? I treated your dinner just as you treated my sermon. I was out seeking for what I did not like just as you were, and I found it.

Now everybody will agree that the judgments passed by the vulture and by the cat and by you and by myself were false judgments. But they are no more false than is your estimate of your neighbor's character when you are seeking only for something to criticize. There is

not a character in all the world so pure as not to be found utterly wanting at the hands of the man who is seeking only for the worst. Jesus Christ Himself did not escape. The churchmen of His day were so eager to find something to condemn in Him that they found absolutely nothing to praise. When He healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath, they did not ask the healed man who had wrought his cure. They asked him who it was that told him to take up his bed and walk. They were seeking for something to condemn. And, so seeking, they worked themselves into such a heat of indignation that they convinced themselves that they were doing God's service when they crucified His only begotten Son.

(2) Not only does the spirit of faultfinding lead us to a wrong estimate of our brother in that it causes us to minimize his virtues and to magnify his faults; it also leads us to a wrong estimate of ourselves. But our error now is in the opposite direction. The faultfinder tends ever to minimize his own faults and to magnify his virtues. The sin he hates and condemns is the sin of the other fellow. The virtues that are winsome and worth while are his own. For instance, he calls attention to the hypocrites that are in the Church. His sin in rejecting Jesus Christ and in making no effort to serve is nothing. His virtue in not being a hypocrite is everything.

Christ enforces the truthfulness of the foregoing in the passage before us. Here are two men. One has a mote in his eye. The mote is a thing so small that you can scarcely see it except through a magnifying glass. The other man has a beam in his eye. He has a whole log. It is something big, glaring, easily seen. In fact it is something that it is impossible not to see.

Yet this man with the log in his eye is so concerned over the mote in his brother's eye that he becomes at once absolutely unconscious of the almost perfect vision of his brother and the almost total blindness of himself. Thus does the spirit of faultfinding tend to blind us both to the truth about ourselves and about our fellows as well.

2. Now since the habit of faultfinding tends to make us blind to our brothers' virtues and to our own vices; since it causes us at once to magnify his faults and our own virtues, it leads inevitably to pride and self-satisfaction. Was ever a man more pleased with himself than the Pharisee that went up into the Temple to pray? He has absolutely no sin to confess. He has no defect to be corrected. In himself he sees absolutely no wrong. Why so? Because he is so busy picking out the defects in a certain poor fellow who is pounding himself on the breast and saying in broken-hearted penitence, "God be merciful unto me a sinner."

3. Because this critical spirit ministers to our pride and leads to self-complacency, it makes repentance impossible. No man who is satisfied with himself repents. No man whose eye is fixed on his brother's sin instead of on his own ever repents. A man came to me not long ago professing that he was eagerly in search of salvation. But I found that he was good only at confessing the other man's sin. Of course he did not find Christ. No such man ever did or ever will. Not till we cry in heartbroken bitterness in the presence of our own moral ugliness, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned," shall we come to find Him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

4. This faultfinding spirit also kills our usefulness. Few folks are ever helped by sharp and unbrotherly

criticism. Those who do the most for us are not those that believe the worst about us, but those who believe the best. We instinctively resent the man who comes in a faultfinding spirit to rebuke us. And such rebuking does not help; it hardens. That is the reason Paul writes us this wise word: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." To try to restore in any other spirit is to meet utter failure.

The man who tries to help us by unbrotherly criticism would be positively ridiculous if he were not so pathetic. Think of a man with a log in his eye trying to tell his friend how to get rid of a mote! Imagine a man without a hair on his head undertaking to sell hair tonic! Picture an individual of some four hundred-weight trying to tell his friend of one-third his avoirdupois the best method of reducing! Think of a Pharisee who has just devoured a widow's house and for a pretense made a long prayer lecturing Jesus Christ on keeping the Sabbath. To be a faultfinder kills your usefulness. Such a man is the worst possible contradiction of the Gospel he is trying to preach.

5. Finally, to be a faultfinder is to be found fault with: "Judge not that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

(1) This is true in the here and now. Every day you are being measured by your own yardstick. Every day you are having to buy upon the same scales upon which you sell. The judgments that you are dealing out to others are already being dealt out to you. That friend that yesterday helped you to pick a neighbor to pieces is to-day helping another friend to pick you to pieces. You may have sought to excuse your harsh

criticisms by a pretense of pious motives. But you have deceived nobody except yourself. Your fellows know you. Hence even now they are seeing to it that what measure you mete shall be measured to you again. Even now they are judging you in the spirit in which you judge others.

This is only natural. Kindness begets kindness. Brotherliness begets brotherliness, and hate is ever the father of hate. When I was a boy I used to speak to a great cliff that stood just across the river from the fields where I worked. If I spoke to that cliff harshly it would speak back harshly. If I spoke in gentleness, the voice came back in gentleness. And I have learned that in the hearts of men there is also an echo. The measure we mete to others we receive. The judgments we give, we get.

“There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,  
There are souls that are good and true,  
Then give the world the best you have  
And the best will come back to you.”

(2) This is true also of the hereafter. Beyond the grave the warning still holds: “With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged.” Christ makes this plain when he declares that the man who calls his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire. Why so? Not because our Lord is harsh and vindictive. The sin of this man is not so much that he has this ugly word “fool” upon his lips as that he has contempt and hate in his heart. The man possessed of such a spirit judges himself. He shuts the gate in his own face. This is true for the simple reason that God cannot build a paradise for a loveless critic. He cannot get any man into heaven when that man has hell in his own heart.

## III

What is the cure for this evil habit?

1. The first step toward a cure is the recognition of the fact that faultfinding is a sin. To be forever criticizing, to be forever pointing out the evil in this individual and that, is not a mere weakness of ours. It is not a mark of our moral or our intellectual superiority. Often we feel as if this were the case. That is what Iago thought. Hence he said with a prideful swagger: "I am nothing if not critical." But in fact such conduct is a mark of a wicked and unregenerate heart. Such a man is certainly a moral failure. I do not say this on my own authority, but on the authority of the word of God: "If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." Let us face this fact squarely. No man who is a perpetual faultfinder can be a follower of Jesus Christ.

2. Not only must we recognize that faultfinding is a sin, but we must repent of that sin. And by repentance the Bible means that you must cease to do the evil that you have been doing. You are to take yourself in hand and say: "By the grace of God I will cease to seek for the worst. I will cease to be a self-appointed inspector of warts and boils and carbuncles. I will cease to usurp the throne of the Lord Almighty. I will realize that there is some bit of good in every man, and I will try for Christ's sake to look for the good and not simply for the bad."

Such a course would, I am persuaded, be a revelation to all of us. For the seeker for the best finds it as surely as does the seeker for the worst. There is always something to commend. A very disreputable

cur dog came to the parsonage the other day. I did not like a thing about him. But my small boy saw him through different eyes. He is a lover of all dogs. So when I commented on his ugliness, he responded very promptly, "But, Daddy, he can wag his tail good." There were a thousand ugly sins of which the woman at the well was guilty. But Jesus saw something fine in her. He complimented her on the fact that she told Him the truth in saying that she had no husband. Also He gave her credit for longing for heights regardless of the fact that she was even then foundering in the mud.

3. But if this evil habit is to be cured, we must have a power above and beyond ourselves. I can refuse to say the unkind thing by closing my lips and biting my tongue. But even then I may go on thinking it. But "love," Paul tells us, "thinketh no evil." Love does not judge harshly because it has no desire to do so. "Love worketh no ill to its neighbor," not even the ill of an unkind thought or of an unjust criticism.

How, then, are we to get hold on love? It is easy not to criticize our own children. It is easy not to criticize those that are dearest to us. But those that differ from us, those that criticize us and spitefully use us, that is different. How are we to get hold on a love that will enable us to think tenderly even of these? How are we to be empowered with such a spirit of gentleness and kindness that when we are reviled it may be written of us that we reviled not again? There is only one answer to this question. We must get hold on God. We must let His Spirit fill us so full of love that there will be no room for hate. If He possesses us, this ugly sin will vanish as the night vanishes at the approach of the morning. This is true because "the fruit of the Spirit is love."

## IV

### THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

#### *I Kings 8:18*

“Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.”

In my opinion the supreme ambition of David's life was to build a house to the honor of his God. This was the one achievement by which he expected to live in the grateful memory of his people. He had ruled wisely. He had warred victoriously. He had sung songs that will live as long as literature lives. But it was the building of the Temple that was to be his greatest contribution. But this David was not permitted to do. The task that he longed to accomplish was left for other hands. His one big ambition was never realized. His supreme hope never came to fruition. His big dream never became a reality. He had been permitted to do much and to achieve much, but in spite of all this he went down to his grave feeling himself in large measure a failure.

And how many there are that have a fellow-feeling for this disappointed king! We, too, know what it is to fall short. We, too, know what it is to miss the gaining of our goal. We know what it is to fail in the accomplishment of our dearest dreams. Life has not been an utter failure for any of us. Yet we have not reached the heights that we one day thought we should reach. We have not triumphed as we one day hoped we should triumph. There are present not a few who

feel that their lives have been in large measure pathetic and blundering failures.

I can well imagine that Moses felt that way. He set out to deliver his people from the bondage of Egypt and to bring them into a new land. To that end he toiled for almost half a century. The burdens he carried, the heartaches he endured, will never be known by any but himself and his God. Toward the achieving of his great enterprise he accomplished much, but he failed to succeed. When he stood upon the very border of the land of his hopes, there came to him the stern command, "Get thee up into the mountain and die." And though the children of Israel finally entered Canaan, they entered it under the leadership not of Moses, but of another.

But here is a significant fact. While these regard themselves as having failed, God often makes a different reckoning. When David fell asleep, there was no temple upon Mount Moriah to catch the first kiss of the morning sun and hold its last lingering caress at eventide. The foundation of this temple had not even been laid. Yet when we look over the books in that land where no mistake is made in the records, we find that not Solomon, but David, is credited with the building of the Temple. Not that he had actually builded any temple in Jerusalem, but he had builded one in his own heart. Therefore, God said, "It is well that it was in thine heart to build it."

## I

From this we can see that God has a different test when it comes to measuring success from what we have. What is the divine test?

He measures us not by our achievements, but by our longings to achieve. He judges us not by what we have in our hands, but by what we have in our hearts. He crowns us not for the great task that we have actually accomplished, but for the great task that we long to accomplish. Browning was right: "It is not what man does, but what man would do that exalts him." God is measuring us even now, not by the triumphs that we have actually achieved, but by the triumphs that we would achieve if we could. He is measuring us not by the gifts that we really make, but by the gifts that we long to make.

You can see, therefore, how different are God's ways from our ways. We measure success by outward accomplishment and by that only. I heard a man who employed a large number of men make this statement: "When I get to my office to-morrow there will be a roomful of men seeking employment. Some of them will have the highest degrees from universities both in America and Europe. But I cannot use most of them because they are ineffective. It is no use to be educated on the Rhine unless you bring home the bacon."

There you have it in a nutshell. Before we count any man a success he must bring home the bacon. He must put over the task. In a newspaper office I read this announcement in box-car letters: "Fifty-seven Rules of Making a Success. First, deliver the goods. Second— Well it does not matter about the other fifty-six." There you have it again. The will to succeed, the yearning to do what is in the heart,—these do not go on the marts of trade and in the business office. It is delivering the goods that counts and that only. But God in His mercy judges us for what is in our hearts.

## II

Now, since this is the case, we may expect many of our human judgments to be reversed.

1. Many that are first will be last. Many who loom large here are going to look very small by and by. Many who flash like suns here will find themselves only poor tallow dips by and by. Many whose pathways were strewn with flowers and whose ears rang with the applause of the crowd will find themselves unacclaimed and uncrowned when they reach life's other side. That is the case because God looks not at our achievings, He looks not upon our successes simply. He looks upon what is in our hearts.

When the Knight Sir Launfal set out in search of the Holy Grail, he rode a fine charger of the best mettle. He was magnificently armored. His pockets were lined with gold. When a leprous beggar asked for help, he did not refuse. He threw a piece of real gold at his feet. But he threw it not in tender compassion, but with utmost loathing. He gave a golden gift, but there was base lead in his heart. And what was the outcome? Not even the beggar was helped.

"The beggar left the coin in the dust.

'Better to me the poor man's crust

Though he turn me empty from his door.' "

Then the years slipped by and the Knight returned, old and worn and broken of heart. One night, with the snow falling upon him and the icy winds making him shiver, he knocked at the door of his own castle. But it was shut in his face. As he turned away he saw crouching by the steps the same old beggar, only more withered and loathsome than years before. But

he did not loathe him. When he asked for alms this time, he shared with him his crust. "And the soul of the beggar stood up in his eyes as he stood before him glorified." Thus the Knight came to know that the gold given others without love was far less than a crust given by the heart and hand of a brother.

2. Then many that are last are going to be first. How many such have I known along the way. Of these, Brother Jim Riley, as we used to call him, was surely chief. He was one of the saintliest men that it has been my privilege to know. Yet nature seemed to have decked him in the cap and bells of a clown. He was always blundering. I never saw an assembly so solemn that he could not throw it into convulsive laughter by merely telling his experience. To those who saw nothing but the outside, he was an utter failure. But to those who saw something of the heart of him, he was at least a partial success. And I dare to believe that he was a veritable conqueror in the sight of Him who measures us not by the poor dross of our achievings, but by the fine gold of our longings.

Then I think of some of those who long to serve but are strangely held back. I used to have one such in my congregation. He was looking with eagerness toward entering the ministry. But tuberculosis put its destroying hand upon him. He began to die by a slow death, but he never lost his longing to preach nor his radiant expectation of usefulness. At last he died without ever preaching a single sermon, or, so far as I know, winning a single soul.

You remember Geordie Howe in Ian Maclaren's beautiful story? Geordie was sent from his obscure Scottish village to the big university. His going was at the price of great sacrifices both for himself and for

those who loved him. While in school he did his best. He won every medal. He came home with the highest honors. He came to enter the ministry. But he did not enter the ministry. He entered the sick room, and a little later he entered a quiet house in the cemetery. And, like my own friend, he died without ever occupying a pulpit or preaching a single sermon.

Think, too, of the missionaries that have gone to give their lives in the foreign fields. Some of them in the eyes of the world were utter failures. There was June Nichols, who went out from our own church. She spent a few brief months among the heathen, returning with nothing accomplished, seemingly, save the breaking of her own health. The roses had gone from her cheek and the sparkle from her eye. She fell asleep with her life's work apparently all undone. Then there was Horace Pitkin, who went out to China and died in the Boxer uprising. He had been there only a very brief period. He never won a single heathen. He died without even living to deliver one sermon to them.

Now is the record of such heroic souls as these to be blank? Never believe it. When one day they find themselves credited with souls that they have never won, with good deeds that they have never performed, with triumphs that they were never permitted to achieve, they will ask maybe: "When did we achieve all these beautiful victories? We thought we failed utterly." And God will answer: "These are the things that you longed to do. These are the things that you would have done if you could. Therefore, you are credited with them on the books of heaven. You did not accomplish them, it is true, but 'It is well that it was in thine heart to do so.'"

## III

But what is the test of what is in our hearts?

There are those who hear a sermon like this and are made to feel very comfortable in their idleness and in their uselessness. They tell themselves how much they would serve if they only had the ability of another, or how much they would give if they only had the wealth of another. They flatter themselves that they wish the cause of Christ well. But so often that is the end for them. They settle down into a smug self-content, congratulating themselves over the big things they would do if they could, while they are making no effort to use the opportunities that are actually theirs.

Now the test of what is in your heart is just this: What you are doing with that which is in your hand. What evidence did David give that he really longed to build the Temple? He did more than simply say that he wished that he could do such a great deed. When he found that the Temple must be built by another, he did not lose interest in it. He did not wash his hands of the whole matter. He did not say that if it is not to be David's Temple, then I will have nothing to do with it at all. That would have been very human. But it would have indicated that David was seeking to build a Temple to his own honor instead of to the honor of his Lord. Whenever we lose interest in any worthy enterprise because we do not occupy a prominent place in it, it shows that we are seeking our own glory and not the glory of God.

David took no such course. When he saw that he would not be allowed to build the Temple, he went just as far as he could toward making it easy for those who

should come after to build it. He could not do the prominent and conspicuous work. He did that which was hidden and obscure. He did that which few eyes saw save the eye of God. He was not asking for honor, he was asking for the privilege of helping. He was willing to be as a grain of wheat to fall into the ground and die that a great harvest might be reaped by another.

Why is the poor widow the greatest giver of the New Testament? Why is she to-day one of the multimillionaires of the Eternal City? It is not because she sobbed over the fact that she could give so little and then did nothing. It is not because she told her friends and neighbors how much she would give were she only rich. It is because she dared give what she had. The fact that she gave her all shows that, while her hand was almost empty, her heart was exceedingly full. Therefore when Christ counted the collection that day, He said: "That poor widow has cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury."

A wounded man one day lay dying by the roadside. Three men passed that spot and looked upon that battered and broken man. Two of these passed him by. When they were safe home they possibly told their friends what they would have done if they had only been surgeons, or if they had only had an ambulance. They told what they would have done if they had only been armed so as to resist the robbers in case there was an attack. But the damning truth remains that they did nothing. Therefore, we condemn them. But our condemnation comes not because of their lack of skill, but because of their lack of heart.

Now the third traveler that passed along the road where was the man who had been robbed and despoiled went to his assistance. And because he did so, we have

given him the highest title that can be given to any human soul. We have called him "The Good Samaritan." We have done this not because of his skill in surgery, nor because he succeeded in getting the wounded man to the hotel. If the man had died on the roadside, under his treatment, or if he had died on the way to the inn, we should still call him good. His goodness was not a matter of ability, it was a matter of heart. It was in his heart to help, and because it *was* in his heart to help, he made an effort.

Beware, therefore, of deadening your conscience with mere promises of what you would do were you more gifted or more wealthy. These amount to naked nothing unless you are doing your best with what is really yours. Remember the solemn words of Jesus Christ: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." If it is in your heart to serve, you will do the big thing if you are able. If you are not able, you will be glad to do the hidden and obscure and insignificant thing that looms large in the eyes of none but Him who loves you and saves you by His grace.

#### IV

Now the fact that we shall be judged by what is in our hearts ought to be a source of great consolation.

1. It is a consolation because it puts us all on an absolute equality. The man with five talents has no better chance than the man with one. The man who is brilliant has no larger opportunity in the sight of God than the man who is stupid. The man in a position of honor has no advantage over him who is in a position that is small and obscure.

2. It is encouraging, in the second place, because it puts the highest possible victory within reach of those who in the eyes of the world may be the greatest of failures. A little girl whose mother had been long ill wanted to buy some dainty food for her, but she had no money. Her only treasure was a little china doll that had been given to her at the mission. She fancied this doll would bring her great wealth because it was so dear to her own heart. So she took it and slipped out to the pawn shop that was not far away. But on the way she fell and broke it. And when she came home she had no dainty food. She had only the fragments of her broken doll and the pain of her broken heart. But the mother understood, and the little child's failure brought joy even richer than her success would have brought.

Have you failed? Have you come into God's house this morning feeling that you have nothing to give but the shattered fragments of broken and lost opportunities? Have you come grieving that you can do so little when you long to do so much? Remember, it is not outward success that is crowned; it is not the gifts of our hands that are reckoned. The real test is the heart test. Therefore the venture you make for Christ's sake cannot fail. If you win your goal, you are a victor. If you fall short, you are a victor still. If you undertake to help and blunder, you will be crowned even for your blunder, if it was made under the impulse of love. "Whereas it was in your heart to help, it is well that it was in thine heart."

## V

### EASY STREET

#### *I Kings 12:28*

"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem."

This is an innocent sounding text. It looks as harmless as the chubby fist of an infant. Its touch seems as soft and velvety as the petal of a rose. You would never dream that it carried a concealed dagger. You would never think it came with dynamite in its hand. It would never occur to you that hidden behind its seeming harmlessness are the fangs of a serpent. And yet this short sentence was the destroyer of multitudes. In fact it was the wrecker of a nation.

Here is the story. The Kingdom of Solomon has become divided. Rehoboam has two tribes and Jeroboam the remaining ten. But while the nation is divided politically, it is not divided religiously. The people are still one in their faith. They still have a common sacred city and a common temple for worship. This being the case, Jeroboam fears that if they continue to be one religiously they will end in being one politically, and thus he will lose his position and power.

To avoid this he set deliberately about the destruction of the religion of the people over whom he was to reign. He entered upon this task in a fashion that speaks well for his keen insight and shrewdness. For instance, he did not make war on religion in general. He did not tell his people that to be religious at all

was at once foolish and futile. He was entirely too wise for that. Religion is something that can never be destroyed. Man is incurably religious. He may have a foolish religion. He may have a hurtful and ruinous religion. But some religion he will have as long as human nature continues to be what it is.

Neither did he undertake to convince these people that their religion was wrong. Had he said to them, "The type of religion in which you have been reared and trained is altogether false and foolish," he would have made little progress. He would have had a fight on his hands at once. For people are ready to fight for their religion whether it is a vital part of their lives or not. You remember how Beauty Steele in "The Right of Way" charmed the lumbermen by singing that old hymn, "In the Sweet Fields of Eden"? The drunken crowd cheered with delight. But when he finished his hymn, he made a speech in which he asked his hearers how they knew there were any sweet fields of Eden. He expressed doubt of the reality of heaven. The result was that he ended in the river with a cracked skull. Jeroboam was too shrewd to make an open attack on religion.

But what he did say was something like this: "While religion is a good thing, and while your own religion is perfectly right and proper, it is giving you too much trouble. There is no harm in going up to Jerusalem, but it is too expensive in time, in labor, and money. Instead of journeying up there to worship, you can build you a calf in your own village and get on just as well. To go to Jerusalem is altogether harmless, to be religious after the fashion of your fathers is perfectly right. But it is not necessary. What I offer you is an easier way. I am offering a religion that is almost

absolutely free from expense of any kind. You can be religious according to my plan and always take the easy way."

Now this suggestion of Jeroboam's met with a ready response because there is that in our human nature that shrinks from the difficult. I know there is also that to which the heroic appeals. If this were not true, there would be no use in my preaching to you. Carlyle was right when he said: "It is not to taste sweet things, but to do true and noble things and to vindicate ourselves under God's Heaven as God-made men and women, is that after which every son of Adam dimly longs." But along with this is a great inclination to shrink from doing the thing that gives us any serious trouble. This easy religion won its way, and in winning it, it proved the undoing of the nation.

Now the easy way did not lose its appeal these long centuries ago. It is still present with us, and its invitation to us is this: "Do not make truth the test of your religion. Do not make its power to save and to transform the test. Let ease be the test. Choose that church, choose that type of religion that makes the smallest demands." That is an appeal that is being made to every man and woman in this audience. We must face it and settle it one way or another.

We ought to decide against the religion of ease for the following reasons:

## I

The man that makes ease the test will fail in the highest realization of himself. We simply cannot come to our best without the facing and the overcoming of the difficult. The truth is that no kind of strength is won

except in the school of conflict. To take the easy way is to head toward failure. There are few outstanding men in all the centuries who were born where life was easy. Those people of the tropics, for instance, who have little to do but shake a banana tree and eat and go back to sleep, never arrive. The sons of the rich, those who are born on the sunny side of the street, do not win half so often as do the sons of the poor. They do not have enough battle to make them strong.

1. This is true physically. The way to the highest physical development is not the path of ease. The man who indulges himself physically cannot possibly be what he might have been if he had taken the more trying way of self-discipline. It is fine to have a strong body, it is a splendid thing to have a healthful house in which to live, but it costs something. It is easy to be an invalid.

2. To take the easy way is to fail to reach our best intellectually. It does not need any argument to prove this. How many bright fellows I have known in school who have made utter failures of life. They could have outdistanced most of their fellows as the hare the tortoise in the famous race, but they would not work. They took it easy. They never learned the fine art of going up against mental problems and wrestling with them till they had conquered. Therefore, they remained mentally flabby and undeveloped when they might have been intellectual athletes.

3. The easy way certainly keeps us from reaching our highest possibilities spiritually. The man that makes ease the test of his religion can never become a Christian. The door is locked fast to every man who is seeking the way of least resistance. For to become a Christian means at the very beginning the denial of

self, and that is not easy. It means the surrender of your life to God, and that always involves a struggle.

Do you remember the answer of Jesus when one asked, "Are there few that be saved?" What did He reply? "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter and shall not be able." "Strive." That is a strong muscular word. It is used to describe the struggle of an athlete. Strive, He says, as in a game, to enter in at the strait gate. It is also a word that is at home on the battlefield. It means fight as a good soldier fights, to enter in at the strait gate. It is a word with panting breath and muscles a-strut and hands stained with blood.

Not only will the man who makes ease the test of his religion never become a Christian, but even should he become one, he could not continue to be one for a single day. The Young Ruler turned sadly away from the Christ because the road was too narrow. Demas forsook Christ after having begun to follow Him because the way in which he was required to walk was too exacting. He loved the present age with its lesser demands. The Christian life is never commended on the grounds that it is an easy way. It is always represented by Christ and His disciples as a way of difficulty and of battle.

"Enter in at the strait gate," said Jesus, "because strait is the gate and narrow the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." That is, the one that walks in the way of Christ finds it a narrow way. It is a way that has limitations. It is not a wide path where you may wander at your will. It is rather a lane hedged in on either side. There are certain things that we cannot do. There are certain things that we must do. We must resist the lure of the broad way. We

must resist the compelling call of the crowd. Many are walking in the other road. If we are not willing to face conflict, then we cannot walk in the narrow way.

A gentleman said some time ago that he had the cocoon of an Emperor moth in his study. As the spring-time drew near he began to hear a struggle inside that prison. Hour after hour there was a scratching and pounding at the door. By and by the man was seized with pity for the poor creature. It seemed to be having such a hard time. So he took a pair of shears and clipped the end off its prison cell and made the way clear to freedom. It now had nothing to do but walk out.

But our friend soon discovered that his intended kindness was the very opposite. When the unsightly creature crawled into the light he could only look upon it with disappointment and disgust. Its body was swollen and unshapely. Its wings were not strong enough for a house fly. All the poor undeveloped thing could do was to crawl off and die. And the pity of it was that there had been another self of rare beauty ahead of this monstrosity. Had it been left to work out its own salvation, it might have spread wings more colorful than the rainbow and drunk the nectar of a hundred flowers. It was a victim of the easy way.

## II

To make ease the test is to fail in achievement. Every man who accomplishes anything worth while does so at the price of hard work. This is true whether he accumulates a fortune, builds a railroad, writes a worthwhile book or becomes a saint. It is a good day for us when we cease to expect something for nothing. It is

a good day for us when we face the fact squarely that if we accomplish anything worth accomplishing, we must pay the price.

It takes some of us a great while to find this out. That is the reason that in school we are so often hunting for a soft snap. That is the reason that out of school we are hunting for an easy job. That is the reason so many of us get caught by tricksters and fakers. That is the reason why some are simple enough and idiotic enough to stake their money on the turn of a card or the outcome of a horse race. There are always those foolish enough to believe that they will somehow beat the game and get something for nothing. But to achieve, I repeat, is to work.

I have just been reading the lives of some of the most eminent preachers of England. They differed in many respects, but in one respect they were all alike, and that is that they were prodigious workers. That is true of all men who get anywhere. Dante wrote a book that lives to this day. But he declared that it made him lean for years. The children used to point him out by saying, "See the man who has been in hell." So necessary is hard work that one has wisely said that genius is an endless capacity to take pains.

Now the accomplishment of your mission as a child of God is subject to the same demands. Why do so many Christians fail to accomplish anything worth while? Here is one reason, an unwillingness to work. Why did the sluggard not raise a crop? It was too much trouble. Why did the children of Israel that came out of Egypt die in the wilderness without ever claiming the land that God had given them? They were not willing to put themselves to any serious trouble. You can possibly get through life with very little

effort. But if you do, you may be assured of this also, that you will get through with very little accomplished.

### III

The final reason I give for avoiding Easy Street is that it so often ends in Rotten Row. The truth of this has been illustrated in countless numbers of lives. Into a brilliantly lighted saloon, years ago, there walked a seedy human derelict. He found himself in a company of gay young men who were willing enough to comply with his request for a drink. "Make us a speech," shouted one of the revelers when the tramp had emptied his glass. "It's a poor liquor that will not loose a man's tongue." To their surprise the wreck steadied himself and began:

"Gentlemen, I look to-night at you and at myself and it seems to me that I look upon the picture of my lost manhood. This bloated face was once as young and handsome as yours. This shambling figure once walked as proudly as yours. I was a man in the world of men. I had health, friends, and a position. I had a wife that to me at least was as beautiful as an artist's dream. I had a home where love lit the altar and ministered before it, but I put out the holy fire and darkness and desolation reigned in its stead. To-night I stand a husband without a wife, a father without a child, a tramp in whom every good impulse is dead." What was the matter? It was too much for him to go up to Jerusalem.

A somewhat kindred story you could tell of Edgar Allan Poe. Surely he was one of the most brilliant men of letters that America has produced. He could write poetry that was liquid music. He could outsing the

skylark. But he was devoid of that stern stuff that enabled him to be master of himself. A ruinous passion fluttered in from out the dark, like his own raven, and cast its black shadow over his life.

“And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming;  
And the lamplight o’er him streaming throws the shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore.”

Attention has been called to two pictures that Rembrandt painted of himself. The one he painted in the days of his youth when he was a struggling young artist. His face is strong and fine and clean. The other pictures him in his later years after he has won his success. The contrast between these two faces is too tragic for tears. Rembrandt’s success brought him ease and ease brought him moral decline. The picture of the older man is one that shows that “the candles of his soul” have been blown out. But his light was not blown out by the rude breath of the tempest. It was rather snuffed out by the choking atmosphere of the easy way. For him as for countless others, it was too much to go up to Jerusalem.

## VI

### A GOOD HATER

#### *Matthew 18:25*

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

This is a part of the story of a good hater. Had you talked with this man, he would have told you with pride that he never forgot an injury. He would have told you that if a man did him an ill turn, he got even with him regardless of the cost. In the story of which our text is a part, he carried out his program to the letter. He refused to let the man who owed him get by. But in so doing, he does not win a great victory. He only passes out of the sunshine into the gloom of a prison cell. He only goes from the glad privilege of freedom to dress his soul in chains.

#### I

Hate is not at a premium in the Kingdom of God. Good haters are not popular. In fact, the door into that Kingdom is so narrow that whoever would enter must leave all of his grudges behind. In order to be a Christian, it is absolutely necessary to forgive. There is no truth more clearly taught in the New Testament than that. And He that gives that truth its supreme emphasis is Jesus Christ Himself.

For instance, He taught us a prayer. One of the

petitions of that prayer runs like this: "Forgive us our trespasses." How? To what extent? "As we forgive those that trespass against us." That is, the measure of the forgiveness that we are to seek is the measure of the forgiveness that we give.

Not only is the necessity of forgiveness emphasized in this prayer. It is also enforced elsewhere with a plainness that cannot be misunderstood. "If ye forgive not men their trespass, neither will your Father forgive your trespass." That is, the unforgiving simply cannot be forgiven. Hate is sin. The one who clings to that sin can no more find pardon than the one who clings to any other. Therefore to be forgiven, it is absolutely necessary to forgive.

## II

Why is this the case? Why will not God forgive the unforgiving?

God does not refuse to forgive because He is angry and wishes to retaliate. His refusal is in no sense arbitrary. I might say to my small boy, "Unless you wash your hands you cannot eat your dinner." That condition is arbitrary. He could eat his dinner and enjoy it greatly with his hands unwashed. But the reason God will not forgive the unforgiving is because He cannot. God can no more forgive the man that has hate in his heart than He can make twice two eight. He can no more do it than He can make life to be death at one and the same time.

We can see why this is true when we consider what divine forgiveness means. What does it mean for God to forgive? It does not mean simply that He saves us from the consequences of our sin. Sometimes pardon

carries with it salvation from sin and also from its consequences. That was the case with the paralyzed man that was let down through the roof. Christ forgave his sins and healed his body at the same time. But this is not always done. It was not so in the case of David. David was freely forgiven but he was not saved from the terrible consequences of his sin. What then does it mean for God to forgive? It means far more than the remission of a penalty. It means that the wrongdoer, estranged by his sin, becomes reconciled to God. It means the giving of a new nature. It means a new creation. It means that the pardoned man passes out of death into life. It means that he trusts God and that God trusts him.

It is evident, therefore, how impossible it is for God to give a man a new heart of love when he persists in clinging to the old heart of hate. He cannot create any man anew when he, with deliberate purpose, insists upon remaining his old self. He cannot give any man life when that man turns his back upon Him and clings with his might to ghastly death. The pardoned man is the man who has become a partaker of the divine nature. Therefore for God to pardon a man and that man continue to be a hater is an absolute impossibility.

### III

Now, since forgiveness on our part is an absolute necessity in order for us to live as sons of the Kingdom, what is it for us to forgive? When Christ enjoins forgiveness, what does He mean by it?

First, He means far more than mere indifference to those who have done us ill. A man sought the other day to do you an injury. You did not retaliate. You did

not seek to return evil for evil. You treated the whole matter with utter contempt. You said, "I cannot afford to stop the train to throw stones at every dog that barks at me." You passed over the intended insult as beneath your notice. Now that was better than a spirit of revenge, but it was far from Christian forgiveness.

Neither does Christian forgiveness consist merely in the refusal to exchange railing for railing or blow for blow. There are times when we refuse to say a single harsh word about those who have spoken evil of us. There are times when we refuse to wrong those who have wronged us. Yet we may do so by a determined effort at self-control. We may do so and hate them heartily at the same time.

What is it, then, to forgive? It is more than passing over an injury as unworthy of notice. It is more than exercising stoical self-control and refusing to hit back. It is to have the attitude of a brother even toward our enemies. Thus it is a thing of the heart. We can understand the nature of the forgiveness that is required of ourselves in the light of the divine forgiveness. When God forgives, He trusts us, He takes us back into His confidence. He forgets that we have ever done wrong. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." When God forgives, He forgets. So must we if we are to be His children.

This we are to do regardless of the nature of the injury that we have suffered. There are some wrongs that wound far worse than others. There are some that are most difficult to forgive. But however difficult, every wrong must be forgiven. There is no injury that we can receive that is so hideous and so ruinous that it gives us the right to hate. Every injury must be forgiven.

This is true, also, regardless of how persistently we are wronged. "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Peter thought he was putting the case very strongly. But Jesus answered: "I say not till seven times, but unto seventy times seven." That is, we are to forgive indefinitely. We are to be constantly in the possession of a forgiving spirit.

## IV

That is putting the standard high. How are we to attain?

1. I think it may help us to forgive if we face the fact that hate is at once futile and hurtful. When we are wronged, there is that within us which makes us feel that it would be very pleasant to get even with the one who has done the wrong. If we have been injured, it is a mark of the frailty of our human nature to want to retaliate. But I do not think the man ever lived who found the cup of revenge entirely sweet and satisfactory. Hate often hurts the one that is hated. But it never fails to kindle the very flames of hell in the heart of the hater. Therefore it is not a thing to be clung to as a treasure. It is a thing to be put away as a deadly foe.

2. It will help us to forgive if we remember how much the very best of us must be forgiven. That is where the hater of our story is so disappointing. One day he is dragged into the presence of his lord and a reckoning is demanded. His debt is enormous. It amounts to millions. But he has nothing with which to pay. His lord demands, therefore, that he be sold into slavery that some small portion of the money may be

realized. He demands further that his wife and children be subjected to the same horrible fate.

The poor fellow is heartbroken. His own sentence seems almost too heavy to bear. But he suffers yet more because of the tragic plight of those that he loves. He cannot endure their being taken from him and sold into slavery. Therefore, in utter despair, he flings himself at his master's feet. He puts his whole soul into a plea for mercy. "Have patience with me," he cries, "and I will pay thee all." His lord knows that in his desperation he has promised what he can never perform. But he forgets this. His heart goes out to him in pity. He forgives him the whole of his debt. He sends him away a free man with the privilege of making a new start in life.

How changed he is as he comes out from his master's presence. There is a new glow on his cheek. There is a new elasticity in his step. There is a new sparkle in his eye. I cannot but notice it. "You must have had good news," I call to him. "Indeed I have," he answers. "A moment ago I was staggering under the load of a hopeless debt. Now I am free. My big-hearted creditor has given me a receipt for the whole amount though I was unable to pay a penny." And the radiance of his face flashes a bit of light into my own.

But suddenly that radiance fades. It changes into gloom and black night. I am wondering what has happened. Then I see a poor fellow, meanly clad, coming to meet us. His head is bowed with shame. He seems to be terrified. He dares not look up. My heart goes out to him in pity. I cannot imagine what his trouble is. He is on the point of speaking. But before he can speak my friend who was so radiant a moment ago

seizes him roughly by the throat. Holding him thus, he snarls, "You scoundrel, pay me that seventeen dollars you owe me."

The poor wretch seems almost overcome with terror. So desperate is he that he casts himself on his face before his creditor. In this abject position he sobs out his prayer. It so happens that the words that he uses are the very same that the man who is now towering above him in rage used a few moments ago. "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all." But there is no compassion. "Not on your life," he answers. "You cannot get away with that. There is no use in whining." He calls an officer and, like the good hater that he is, has him thrown into prison.

No wonder this man was a disappointment to his master. No wonder that at once he lost his own freedom. He was incapable of living the life of a forgiven man. His debt had been some ten millions. The debt of his brother had been a mere pittance. But his own large debt looked like a mole hill and that of his brother looked like a mountain. Therefore he did not forgive. If he had only realized the largeness of his own indebtedness, it might have been different. If you and I will face the fact that we have a debt to pay that is so large that we can never pay it through all eternity, then we shall find it a bit easier to forgive our faltering and failing brother.

3. Then, we may find help in the example of Jesus. How did Jesus treat his enemies? He did not compromise with them. He did not yield to them. Sometimes He rebuked them. Sometimes He scourged them with the sword of His mouth. There were times when He burned with anger against them. But never was He angry because of an injury that was done to Him-

self personally. Neither did He ever allow His anger to harden into hate. He was the most dauntless fighter that ever lived. But He did all His fighting with love in His heart. It was at the hands of His enemies that He died. But He did not curse them. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

4. But if we are to be truly victorious we need even more than the example of Jesus. We need Jesus himself. "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that hate you, do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you." To all this we may answer, "Lord, it is impossible." There are many Christian virtues that the world can imitate. But here is one that is beyond imitation. It is impossible for me to love my enemies unless I am assisted by grace divine. But if Jesus Himself lives in my heart, He can enable me to forgive and to love my enemies. With Him, nothing is impossible.

A friend of mine, who is a minister, told me this story out of his own experience. He was preaching a series of sermons in a certain southern city. His theme for the morning hour was forgiveness. When the service was over, a cultured and refined woman who sang in the choir invited him home to dinner. When the meal was over, they retired to the sitting room for a bit of private conversation.

"You said this morning that unless we forgive we cannot be forgiven," the woman began. "Did you mean that?" "Yes," replied the preacher, "that is what Jesus says." "Then," said she, bitterly, "that shuts me out. I simply cannot forgive, neither could you, if you were in my place. Did you see that man who sat in the front pew this morning, just at our right? He mur-

dered my husband. He shot him down in cold blood. He did not even give him a chance. That was years ago. But I have hated him ever since. I shall always hate him."

Then the preacher pleaded with her. He fought with her for her soul. At last she came to the place where she declared that she was willing to forgive. But she declared, "I cannot." Then they went to prayer. Soon she arose in newness of life. Immediately she went to the office of the man who had so greatly wronged her. She took his hand in hers and said, "I have come to tell you that I freely forgive you for Christ's sake." And it is not to be wondered at that that man, murderer though he was, sobbed like a broken-hearted child. It is not to be wondered at that he found his way to the Master. It is not to be wondered at, further, that this was the beginning of a new spiritual springtime in that community. Everybody knew that God was working. Nobody can work miracles like that but Him only.

## VII

### THE SAFETY-FIRST VICTIM

#### *Luke 9:58*

"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

#### *Psalm 107:23*

"They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep."

An enthusiastic young man came to Jesus one day with this fine declaration upon his lips: "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus replied to him by saying, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." When the young man heard that, his enthusiasm was chilled. He refused to go further. He said, "I may miss much that I would like to have by my going back; but at least I shall not have to go superfluous to bed to-night, neither shall I have to sleep under the open sky. At any rate, I shall be safe."

But the Psalmist does not approve of the young man of our text. He recognizes that it is often necessary to venture. "They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." This is a big concession for him to make, for he was a Jew, and the Jews were not a sea-faring people. They regarded the

sea with a fear that was akin to positive horror. To them it was a thing of menace and of mystery. When John thought of heaven, he dreamed of it as a place that was not marred by dividing oceans and sundering seas. So he wrote, "And there was no more sea."

To become a voyager was to give up almost everything that the Jew held dear. It was to say good-by to friends. It was to give up his home in the city or in the sedate and quiet village. It was to give up the worship in the synagogue and in the temple. It was to renounce his footing upon the solid and stable earth. Then it was to face danger. To become a plaything of the winds and the waves. It was to endure hardships. It was to face the possibilities of going upon the rocks and making his grave at last among the seaweed, far from the sepulcher of his fathers.

But in spite of this cost, the Psalmist could not shut his eyes to the fact that there was much to be said for the claims of the sea. If the voyager gave up much, he might also gain much. If there were great conflicts, there might also be great compensations. If there were great perils to be faced, there were also great prizes to be won. If he was in danger of meeting with great reverses, there was also a possibility of his achieving great rewards. Hence, he wrote that they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

## I

So these texts present us with two opposite motives.

1. First there is the prudential motive. This motive appeals to our fears. It appeals to our love of

safety and of ease. It tells us that the thing of most importance is to avoid danger, to escape conflict, to dodge difficulty. Safety-first is its motto. It blinds our eyes to the thing to be achieved and focuses our attention purely on the unpleasant and dreadful things that are to be shunned.

2. The second is the hope of reward. Instead of fixing our gaze upon the difficulties it fixes it upon the prizes that are to be won by adventuring. It is the program of the man who dares. He may have a sane and intelligent knowledge of the importance of safety, but that is not his supreme aim. It is entirely a secondary matter. The big thing is to be and to know,—“to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” It focuses our attention not upon the difficulty to be dodged, but upon the prizes to be won. He is so absorbed in the discovery to be made that he has little time for thought of the risks to be run in the making of that discovery.

## II

### Contrasting Appeals.

These two motives make their appeal to every individual of every age. They are at our elbows this morning, pleading, arguing, inviting, seeking to win us to their side. Each one has much to say for itself.

1. The safety-first motive speaks a language that is quite convincing. It sets before us a formidable array of risks that we may avoid by refusing to do business in great waters. Supposing that you were yet to be born and that it was a matter of choice with you whether you should be born a human soul of a member of the lower order of beings, this safety-first demon would speak to you after this fashion:—

"I have been up and down among the ways of men. Wherever I have gone, I have found agony and heart-ache. I have seen men use their wills for the making of wrong choices, and I have seen them suffer in consequence. I have known them to spend sleepless nights of agony. I have heard one cry, 'Oh, wretched man that I am.' I have heard one wail, 'Deliver me from blood guiltiness.' I have heard another facing problems of death and separation asking this pathetic question, 'If a man die, shall he live again?'"

"In fact, if you become a human soul, you expose yourself to almost infinite risk. I have seen the infant sinking like a stricken flower to the grave. I have seen the strong man fiercely breathing out his soul upon the field of battle. I have seen the miserable convict stand upon the scaffold. I have viewed death in all its forms of horror and of vengeance. And I have looked upon that which is infinitely worse than death. I have seen sin take manhood in its hands and stain it. I have seen it wreck homes and put an impassable barrier between loving hearts. I have seen it put its defiling fingers upon womanhood and despoil it.

"On the other hand, if you enter the world as a lower order of being, your risks are greatly lessened. For instance, I have been up and down in oysterland, but I have never heard an oyster sob. I have never known an oyster to spend a sleepless night. I have never known him to weep either over his own sins or over the sins of others. I have never known him to be desolate over a wrecked home. In fact, I have never known one single broken-hearted oyster. I have known them to be dropped into hot grease by the millions. But even then they did not suffer as much as a man would if he pricked his finger with a pin."

This is a convincing argument, is it not? Were I facing the choice I think I should say, "You have made out a good case. There is much suffering ahead, if I choose to become a man. There is almost none, if I go the other direction. But there is one consideration that makes me hesitate. I have about decided to become an oyster, but the inducements you hold out are purely in the negative. You do not state what I will attain, but only what I will avoid. You offer no reward. You promise nothing better than a handful of gilded ciphers, a purse of fairy gold."

With these facts in mind, I am asking this safety-first demon some questions. "What positive gain is there in my taking the lower road? If an oyster never sobs, he must do a great deal of singing. If he never breaks his heart over his own sorrows nor over those of others, he must be a very happy creature." But my tempter cannot say that such is the case. He has to confess that he has never seen any real joy in oysterland. He is forced to tell me frankly that the price he pays for his incapacity to suffer is an incapacity to enjoy. The price he pays for his incapacity to go wrong is an incapacity to go right. The price he pays for his lack of ability to break his heart through grief is his lack of ability to gladden his heart through love.

Then I look in the other direction. Suppose I take the upper road. "Suppose I dare to be a man in spite of the dangers?" He has to answer, "You may sorrow, but you may also rejoice. That very man who cried, 'Oh, wretched man that I am,' said in great peace, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' The man who prayed to be delivered from blood guiltiness sang a little later, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' And the man who asked

the solemn question about living again, later has this shout upon his lips, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth and in the later days He shall stand upon the earth—yet in my flesh shall I see God.' ”

Were you to face the choice whether you should be a man or not, I am sure not a single one would choose the lower road. The risks that we run are very real, but the rewards are not negative rewards. They are positive. I am willing to have a capacity to go down, in order to have a capacity to rise. I am willing to be capable of suffering the very pangs of hell in order to be capable of enjoying the bliss of heaven.

“She built herself a little house  
All walled about with Pride;  
Took Prudence as a servant,  
And locked herself inside.

“She drew the blinds down tight as tight  
When Sorrow chanced to roam.  
Experience called—she sent down word  
That she was not at home.

“Then wherefore should she now complain  
And wherefore should she sigh,  
That Life and Love and Laughter  
Have passed, unseeing, by?”

Now while the decision as to whether we shall be man or not is not left to us, the decision as to whether we shall live our lives on the higher or lower plane is left to us. It is for us to choose whether we shall obey the dictates of safety-first or whether we shall not. It is for us to decide whether we shall seek negative values or values that are real. For bear in mind that the

way of safety offers no real values. It only promises exemption from certain ills. But to the man who scorns safety-first and dares adventure, there is promise of highest possible reward. He will become a discoverer. Visions will come to him that are utterly unknown to those who do not dare. He will be thrilled by the discovery of winsome wonders that must forever remain hidden from him who refuses to do business in great waters.

### III

Wherein is this true?

1. It is true in the realm of the physical. The man who ventures is the man who discovers. All our knowledge has been brought to us by adventurers. The man who revolutionized astronomy and who thought God's thoughts after Him was a man who dared. Those who have achieved in the science of healing have also been the men with courage to venture. I have a friend who is one of the greatest X-ray specialists in America. I have watched him as he lost one finger after another. Sometime ago he lost a hand. He was a pioneer in his field. He paid a great price. He faced many tempests. But he was rewarded by seeing the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

The same is true of the world on which we live. We know this world to-day almost as well as we know our own backyard. But it has not always been so. Only a few centuries ago it was in large measure an unknown world. In the days of Columbus out a little beyond Europe were unknown seas. Here the old geographers had written such expressions as these, "Here be demons. Here be dragons that devour men." But Columbus believed that continents lay beyond those

seas. Upon that conviction he staked his reputation and his life.

"Behind him lay the great Azores,  
 Behind the gates of Hercules;  
 Before him not the ghosts of shores,  
 Before him only shoreless seas.  
 The good mate said: 'Now we must pray,  
 For lo! the very stars are gone.  
 Brave Adm'r'l, speak. What shall I say?'  
 'Why say, "Sail on! sail on! and on!"'

"Then pale and worn, he kept his deck,  
 And peered through darkness, Ah, that night  
 Of all dark nights! And then a speck—  
 'A light! a light! a light! a light!  
 It grew, a starlit flag unfurled;  
 It grew to be Time's burst of dawn.  
 He gained a world; he gave that world  
 Its grandest lesson: 'On! Sail on!'"

2. Then those who venture discover in the realm of the spiritual. In fact, there is absolutely no knowing God without adventuring. One reason we know so little of God to-day in our personal experiences is because we dare so little for Him. If our biggest voyages are confined to a mill pond, we shall never have to fisticuff with tempests. But it is equally certain that we shall never have the thrill of any great discovery. The man who knows God best is the man who is most fully adventuring for Him.

The proof of this is seen in the lives of countless thousands. One day God said to Abraham, "Get thee from thy father's house and from thy kindred, and I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." By re-

fusing this call, Abraham could have saved himself a great deal of trouble. He might have found life much easier in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. But at the cost of great sacrifice, he set out. He dared all for God, and his reward was that he came to be known as the Friend of God.

Moses was finding life quite easy as a Shepherd in the Midian desert. He was "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." But God called him to the doing of a great task. The call involved danger and hardship and sacrifice that only he and God will ever know. How much easier a life he would have had if he had only said, "No." How much suffering he would have missed. But he would have missed something more than suffering, something more than sacrifice. He would have missed seeing God face to face. He would have missed talking with God as friend talks with friend. He would have missed journeying with God into the mountain when God smote him and "kissed down his eyelids still." He would have missed being on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. He would have missed giving to the world a new nation. If he was a great adventurer, he was also a great discoverer.

There were two young men who were brought under the influence of Jesus. One of them, the rich young ruler, felt the lure of His personality. Jesus said to him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go thy way, sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor and come and take up the cross and follow me." But the young man went away. By so doing, he kept his wealth for a while. He kept his palace, his vineyards, his servants. In fact this interview with Jesus did not cost him a thing.

But there was another young man whose name was

Stephen. He was brilliant and gifted. He was one of the finest intellects in the early Church. He heard the call of Jesus and adventured upon it. He dared all. In the eyes of some he lost all. He was mobbed. He was stoned to death. But while they stoned him, the record says that his face was as the face of an angel. The young ruler missed that thrilling vision. Stephen fell asleep with this prayer upon his lips, "Father, lay not this sin to their charge." The young ruler died, so far as we know, quietly in his bed. But he never discovered that power that could enable a man to love his enemies and to bless them while they persecuted him.

What kind of a life are you going to live? One that never dares anything? One whose biggest voyage is made in a bath tub? One who gives no time, who ventures nothing upon God? Then you will make no discoveries. You will live and die in ignorance of the things that really count. But if you refuse to become a victim of the safety-first demon; if your talents, your money, your all, are ventured for God, you will learn for yourself that they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

## VIII

### THE FATAL REFUSAL

*Mark 10:22*

"He went away."

"He went away." This short sentence contains the tragedy of a soul. You cannot read it intelligently without feeling a touch of heartache. It makes you lonely like sitting by a fireside that is cold, waiting for steps that never come. "He went away." Not that Jesus put his two hands on his shoulders, turned him about, and pushed him away. Not that Jesus looked into his soul and saw stains that made discipleship for him an impossibility. Not that he read his yesterday and told him that its soiled pages made it impossible for him to accompany Him. "He went away." This young man, holding his destiny in his own hands, having the power to say yes or no, turned his back on the wooing, winsome Christ and refused to follow Him.

His story is one of the most disappointing to be found in the New Testament. This is true because we know of no single man that came into personal contact with Jesus during his earthly ministry who was richer in possibilities. No story of any disciple begins more hopefully than does the story of this man. No morning ever had a more promising dawn than his. Therefore it is all the more sad when we see this bright morning change into gloom and tempest and night. One moment he is running courageously to meet Jesus. He

is even kneeling at the feet of Jesus. The next he has gone away, carrying with him his fine gifts and his big, broken heart. How disappointing! The superb worth of him only makes his failure the more tearful and pathetic.

## I

Look what tremendous assets he brings to this interview.

1. There is the wealth indicated by the name that he has come to wear. He is the "Rich Young Ruler." Material wealth is in his hands. That means power. Money is condensed energy, it is pent up force. If consecrated to God, it may be an instrument of endless good. Then, he is a ruler. That is, he belongs to the aristocracy. He is a "blue blood." He is a member of that class that was later to crucify Jesus. How much he might have done to win those of his social standing if he had only given himself up to the Master.

Better still, he is young. He is standing at the morningtide of life. It is fine to surrender to Jesus at any time. It is great to be born again even if that wonderful transformation takes place when we are old. It is better to give the last brief inch of life's dying candle to Christ than never to surrender at all. But how much better it is to give Him a whole life! He was young. His was the privilege, therefore, of giving himself to Jesus from the sweet days of springtime to the last hour of winter. That privilege is a treasure unspeakably rich. Christ wants our old age, but how intensely He yearns for our youth.

2. Then this young man was possessed of a noble restlessness. He was in the grip of a fine discontent. Now, there is much of our discontent that is mean and

unworthy. This is usually the case when we are dissatisfied only with what we have. Such dissatisfaction is, as a rule, not a mark of bigness, but of littleness. It is not a mark of unselfishness, but of the opposite. Here are two babies. They each have a rattle. Those rattles are exactly alike. But one sees that in the hands of the other. He throws his own away and seeks to possess that of his neighbor. This they do because they are babies.

This young man was not simply dissatisfied with what he had. Of course he had discovered that things were powerless to meet his deepest needs. But his supreme discontent was with himself. He was not restless because of what he possessed. He was restless because of what he was. Though rich in the things that almost all desire, he knew that he had not attained the best. He was looking wistfully toward the heights.

Now it is for such a man that we can hope. The self-satisfied man drives us to despair. If you are as learned as you want to be, you are not likely to learn any more. If you are as good as you want to be, you will certainly not get any better. If you are as high up the hill as you care to be, then you will not climb any higher. Self-satisfaction stops us on the road of life. It means arrested development. But dissatisfaction opens the way to progress.

Some years ago, a brother and myself were summering in Colorado Springs. While students at Webb School, we had heard Mr. Webb tell of a visit he had once made to the top of Pike's Peak. There was no cog road running up the mountain at the time of his visit. To reach the summit, those who did not walk had to ride either on burros or in carriages. He declared, therefore, that he exercised great care in selecting his con-

veyance. He wanted to be sure of reaching his destination. At last he chose a carriage with these words written on its sides: "Pike's Peak or bust." He believed that this motto went far toward guaranteeing success.

Now on the very day after our arrival we decided to visit Pike's Peak. But we made no effort to locate the carriage that Mr. Webb had used. No more did we choose a burro. We even scorned the motor car. We determined to climb. We entered upon this undertaking, however, with the motto in our hearts and upon our lips that we had learned from our famous teacher. "Pike's Peak or bust," we said glibly as we set out upon our journey. Soon we found that the undertaking was far more difficult than we had expected. How endless the road seemed. How weary we became. But when I would drop behind, my brother would shout back at me, "Pike's Peak or bust." Then I would put forth extra energy till I found myself in the lead. Then I would call back to him that same ringing battle cry, "Pike's Peak or bust." How near it came to being this latter you will never know. But we refused to give up.

Here and there, however, we would stop and take a view of the way along which we had come. We would gaze with delight upon the far-flung panorama that lay below. There at the foot of the mountain was the little village of Manitou; a little further away, Colorado City, then Colorado Springs. Stretching far in the distance was the wistful plain. As we looked and thrilled we said, "This is enough for to-day, let us go back and come again." Then we would turn our faces and there, far above us, we could glimpse the summit, scintillating and sparkling under its mantle of eternal whiteness. It seemed to be calling to us, "You have not seen the

highest yet; the best is yet to come." And we could not rest until we had reached the top.

This young man was being lured by the heights. That was the secret of his restlessness. Had he responded, he would have found his needs abundantly met. For walking with Christ is like making a journey into a new country. It is like a mountain climb where the atmosphere becomes more bracing and where the panoramas become more enchanting with each step of the way. Happy is the man whose spiritual hungers and thirsts make him dissatisfied. Happy is he whose dissatisfaction sends him to Him who is able to satisfy the longing soul and to satisfy it forevermore.

3. Not only was this young man possessed of a noble restlessness but he was an eager seeker after that which could give him rest. How earnest he was. How enthusiastic. We read that he ran to find Jesus. Enthusiasm is beautiful in any worthy cause. Everybody loves earnestness just as everybody hates insipidity and negativeness. But if enthusiasm is commendable in the ordinary affairs of life, how doubly commendable is it in the pursuit of the highest and of the best. How tragic to be enthusiastic and dead in earnest about the things of secondary value and listless and indifferent about the things of eternal value. This young man was an earnest and enthusiastic seeker after Christ.

4. He was a man of great courage. He ran down the road to find Jesus when nobody else was running. That in itself was a very courageous piece of conduct. It is easy to run with a crowd. But how hard when you run alone. It is easy to stand with the multitude but it is not easy to stand alone. Then of the few that were about Jesus, not one was in his social circle. They were not aristocrats, that little handful of fisher-

men. The Master Himself was not. What fine courage it took, therefore, for this "blue blood" to go down the road before the gaze of the crowd and get down on his knees before a man who had the calloused palms of a day laborer.

5. Then this young man was reverent. That is a fine virtue that is none too common. A present day humorist has declared that if you were to examine the bump of reverence on the head of the modern man you would find it to be a dent. Reverence is a mark of moral fineness. It is the roadway to knowledge in every department of life. It is absolutely essential if we are to make our way into the secret place of the Most High. This young man in spite of culture and wealth and position still knew how to bend the knee. He still knew how to pray. He was reverent.

6. Finally, he was morally clean. He was beautifully unspotted. He was loyally religious. When Jesus put to him the moral law he was able to answer, "All this have I observed from my youth." Think not that he was falsifying. Think not that he was playing the hypocrite. Jesus who saw into the heart of him did not think so. Had he thought so He would have rebuked him. But He did not rebuke him. He accepted his statement for what it was, the plain truth. He appreciated his fine moral worth and gave him high approval.

"Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him." Then Jesus, looking at him searchingly and seeing how manly and straightforward and clean he was, loved him. Do not stumble at the fact that Jesus had a peculiar love for this man. Do not think for a moment that because He is the Saviour of the world He looks with the same eyes upon the pure and upon the vicious. Do not think

for a moment that He looks with the same eyes upon the young fellow that is clean and upon him that is a moral leper. As far from perfection as we are, we do not. Christ loves all with an everlasting love. But He looks with peculiar love upon those possessed of the high moral worth that belonged to this young man.

## II

But in spite of all these fine assets, there was a want in this young man's life. He acknowledged as much when he came to kneel at the feet of the Master. When Matthew tells the story, he puts this question in the young man's mouth, "What lack I yet?" "I have wealth and position. I have decency and morality. I am even religious. Yet there is a want in my life. I have missed the highest. I have not found the best. What is the matter?" To this statement of the case Jesus agreed exactly. He did not tell the young man that he was a bit morbid. He did not say that he was unfair in his judgment of himself. He said, "One thing thou lackest." "With all of your fine qualities, with all of your splendid virtues you have not arrived. There is something wanting." "One thing thou lackest."

1. What was the thing that this young man lacked? I stood beside a baby bed the other day in which a little girl was suffering. By and by, I saw her lift her hand and strike a curl of golden hair that lay upon her forehead and then drop that hand at her side. I heard the mother sob. I saw the face of the father become wet with tears. What was the matter? As I looked at that little girl her hair was just as golden as it ever was. Her teeth were just as pearly white. Her little hands

were just as delicate and shapely. Yet I had to say, "Bessie, darling, one thing thou lackest." What was it? Life. The sweet little girl was dead.

What was the matter with this Rich Young Ruler? What did he lack? Answer, he was short on spiritual life. He was religious. But his religion was not that essential something that means the life of God in the soul. He was a member of the Church, but he had not been born anew. He was moral, but had never passed out of death into life. He had a thousand good qualities, but he had never laid hold on Him who came that we might have life and have it in abundance.

But, there he is kneeling at the feet of Him who is a Specialist in the realm of Life. He is kneeling before Him of whom it is said, "He that hath the Son, hath Life and he that hath not the Son hath not Life." And this Jesus is telling him the way out of his want. He is telling him how the one thing he lacks may be possessed in rich abundance. He makes it very plain. "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor,—and come, take up the Cross and follow me." And what response does he make? Does he spring to his feet in gladness? Does he burst into thanksgiving that the way has been made so plain? By no means. He rises with night in his soul and a sob in his throat and turns away.

2. This brings us therefore to his second lack. Not only did he lack Life, but he lacked the willingness to pay the price of Life. Jesus read the heart of him. He knew what stood in his way. He knows what stands in your way and mine. It may be a trifle. It may be something that is very worthful. But whatever it is, if it keeps you from saying, "Yes" to Jesus Christ, then it has proved your undoing. The Young Ruler wanted

to be a Christian, but he did not want to be one intensely enough to pay the price. Therefore, he went away.

## III

What was the result of his refusal?

1. First, he failed to become a disciple of Jesus. That was true in spite of all his fine qualities. That was true in spite of this fact that Jesus yearned to number him among His friends and followers. Does not the story say that He loved him? But even He cannot compel the weakest of us to follow against his will. All He can do for this fine young man is to invite him. If he refuses, if he goes away, then there is nothing more than He can do. He did go away. He refused to follow Jesus. Therefore he missed the high privilege of becoming a disciple.

2. Refusing to become a disciple, he refused Life. What a tragedy! Refusing Life, he refused all that could satisfy either in this world that now is or in that which is to come. Look! He is going away. Where? Back to his wealth, back to his palace, back to his possessions. But these had not met his needs before. They were still more powerless to meet them now. Where is he going? Away from Life. Now the road away from Life leads only toward death. So the last glimpse we get of this princely young man, he is facing toward abiding restlessness, moral poverty, spiritual death.

"He went away." That is a sentence out of the biography of a man who lived and fought and lost long years ago. To-night you face the same Christ that he faced. He had his chance and threw it away. You still have yours.

The Christ that yearned for him, now yearns for you. The Christ that invited him, now invites you. Your response to that invitation remains yet to be written. What answer will you make? "Will you also go away?" asks the Master wistfully. Will you not answer in the language of one who loved Him well enough to die for Him—"To whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life!"

## IX

### THE SLAVE OF THE SECOND BEST

#### *Numbers 10: 29-31*

"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.

And he said unto him, I will not go: but I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred.

And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes."

It is usually assumed that Hobab gave heed to Moses and joined with him in his great enterprise. But I do not so read the story. To the first invitation, it stands written in the record that he gave a flat refusal. Then Moses made a second and more pressing appeal. What Hobab said to this, we do not know. The story gives us no hint of his answer. But we never hear of his being with Moses at a later day. For this reason, and also because he has just said, "I will not," it is my personal opinion that he persisted in his original refusal.

#### I

But if Hobab failed to have a part in this great enterprise it was not for lack of an opportunity.

1. He was invited. He seems to have treated the invitation with indifference. If so, his indifference was not born of the indifference of his friend and kinsman.

That is the secret of much of the indifference that we witness to-day. The reason our children care so little for the things that matter most is often because we care so little. The reason your husband is so little concerned about his personal relationship to Jesus Christ may be because you are so little concerned. The reason your wife gives the Church the second or third place in her interests is because that is your attitude. The reason the world finds it so easy to ignore us is often because we are so indifferent to the needs of the world. Moses was interested enough in Hobab to invite him.

2. Not only did Moses invite Hobab, but he gave the invitation in a most telling way.

(1). Moses invited Hobab personally. I believe in invitations from the pulpit. I believe in the invitation of the Sunday-school teacher to the class as a whole. But the most compelling invitation is that which is given personally. The men that Jesus gathered about Him were almost all of them won one by one. I believe in every form of evangelism that induces men to become followers of Christ, but the most effective yet discovered is that of a personal appeal.

(2). He invited him with convincing sincerity. Moses was himself engaged in the enterprise in which he was trying to enlist the interest of his friend. He was investing all that he was and all that he had in this great undertaking. Therefore, there was naturally a strong appeal in his invitation to Hobab. Such invitations always carry weight. But there is little use for me to ask you to do what I myself am unwilling to do. There is little use lecturing your child upon the value of the Sunday School, when you do not attend it. There is little use preaching to your boy about the worth of the Church, when you yourself ignore it. The

measure of our power to win others to Christ is the measure of the fullness, with which we ourselves are possessed by Him.

(3). Then, this invitation was given earnestly. I do not believe that anybody is ever won by the half-hearted. It is the earnest man that grips us. It is the heart on fire that kindles a flame within our own hearts. There is something fascinating about an earnest man. There is something almost irresistible. But how easy it is to resist the lukewarm and the cold and the morally flabby. One earnest man like Peter, with all his lack of training, is worth any dozen men of the Nicodemus type who seem to be too cultured to be enthusiastic.

A few years ago there was a mission worker striving to reach the lost in one of the slums of Chicago. He became interested in an outcast girl. He literally fought with her for her soul. At last he succeeded in winning her. In the joy of her new-found Lord she went back to the home of her childhood. Now it so happened that her father was a man of great wealth. In token of his deep appreciation of the service of this missionary, he made him a present of a vast sum of money amounting to several millions of dollars. I wonder how much it would increase our enthusiasm if we knew that in the winning of one soul we should also win a fortune?

(4). Finally, this invitation was given intelligently. The appeal Moses made to Hobab was a full-orbed appeal. He compelled his brother-in-law to see some of the advantages that would come should he choose to join with him in his great enterprise. He held out inducements that were very alluring. But they were not half so alluring as those that the Church of Jesus

Christ has to offer to-day. Moses had that to say which should have appealed strongly to his brother-in-law. We, as members of the Church, have an appeal that should be irresistible.

## II

What is that appeal?

1. To follow the lead of Moses, it is the appeal of a promised good. "Come thou with us," said Moses, "and we will do thee good." I dare take this same wooing word upon my lips. I can do so with confidence. I have far more to offer than had this man of the long ago. "Come thou with us." Accept our Lord, enter into our fellowship and "we will do thee good."

Now, I am perfectly aware that this form of invitation is a bit out of fashion. There are those who tell us that men are no longer appealed to by a promised good. They impress us with the fact that they who seek to win people to Christ by an offer of reward, appeal to low and selfish motives. But, whether such appeal is right or wrong, I can say with certainty that the Bible is not above making it. This it does, not once, but over and over again.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Such was the appeal made by an inspired prophet of the long ago. He offered drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry, if they would only come. And the Master Himself is not above making an appeal of the same nature. "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Again He gave this winsome invitation to the tired and the burdened. "Come unto me, all ye

that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Over and over again does God hold out to those whom He seeks to win the offer of a sure reward.

What have we as members of the Church of Jesus Christ to offer men to-day?

(1). We offer you a satisfying Saviour. We offer you a Master who will meet your deepest needs. "What has Christianity that we do not possess?" asked an Indian scholar of Stanley Jones. "Christ," was the prompt answer. "We have Christ." Of course the Indian intended to argue about the relative merits of ethical codes. But to this answer he had no adequate reply. He knew that he had nothing to offer that could possibly compare with Jesus Christ.

Did you come into this place heart-hungry? We offer you the Bread of Life. Are you parched with thirst? Has a moral drought got you in its torturing grip? We offer you the Water of Life. Has sin taken you in its foul fingers and tarnished you and made you unclean? We offer you One who is able to save unto the uttermost. He can so wash you that you shall be whiter than snow. He can give you the peace that passeth all understanding. He can satisfy your longing soul. He can send you away singing:

"Thou, Oh Christ, art all I want;  
More than all, in Thee I find."

(2). We offer you a worthy goal. "We are journeying to a place," said Moses to the man whom he sought to win. We also are on our way to a land of promise. The land we seek is not simply the heavenly home up yonder. We are seeking to make a heavenly place out of this present world. We are on our way to a land flowing with the milk of human kindness and sweetened

with the honey of brotherhood. We are struggling toward that land where the will of God shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Our goal is the complete triumph of Jesus Christ.

(3). We offer you also the privilege of progress. "We are journeying," said Moses. So are we. We have not yet arrived, but we are on our way. We have not attained the heights, but our faces are set in that direction. "We are journeying." I like the word. I love the thought of progress. How dull it is to do "the goose step" like a bunch of raw recruits. There is no fun in standing still. There is no thrill in slipping back. But to journey, to glimpse new scenery, to climb new mountain heights, that is worth while.

And that good we can offer you. If you walk with Him, you will be privileged to experience the joy of continuous progress. You will have the fascination of new discoveries. Prosaic monotony will give place to winsome poetry. Every day will bring you a gladsome adventure into a new country. You will make progress until you reach the end of the earthly journey. Then your progress will not be stayed, but quickened. You will go on climbing one Alpine height after another in the land of eternal progress. For "we know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."

(4). A final good we offer you is that of a helpful and bracing fellowship. "Come thou with us," said Moses, "and we will do thee good." "But you have quite a peevish and cantankerous crowd," Hobab might have answered. That would have been quite true. But with all their faults, they were the hope of the world. With all of their faults, the world could have spared any dozen nations better than it could have

spared them. "Yes, they are faulty enough," Moses might have said, "but they will make history, one day. Besides, I would like to introduce you to two young men, Caleb and Joshua, who are already well worth knowing."

"Come thou with us." I dare make that as my appeal. "But the Church is very faulty," you say. I grant it. If we were perfect, you would feel exceedingly uncomfortable among us. In fact you could not endure our fellowship. Besides, with all our faults, the world is getting its best chance at our hands. We are not the ones, as a rule, that are trampling underfoot the integrities that hold civilization together. We are the ones that, above all others, are trying to preach and trying to live that righteousness that exalteth a nation. Therefore, I am not ashamed to say, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good."

2. The second appeal that Moses made to Hobab was the privilege of being of service. "Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes." If you do not care for the good that we have to offer you, then we care for the good that you may do us. We are in need. You have it in your power to help that need. Come, therefore, and help us.

Now, if there are those who object to the former appeal, nobody can object to this latter. I am ready to confess that in some measure we are in the wilderness. This is true of the whole world. There is hate between nation and nation. We are still preparing for war. Lawlessness everywhere stalks abroad. This is in part true of the Church. It is also true of countless individuals. Broken hearts are all about us. Many have lost their faith and have been swept from their moor-

ings. Everywhere there is need. We are a needy Church. We are a needy world.

What is going to be your attitude toward this need? You are not going to cure it by letting it alone. If the Church is not what it ought to be, you are not going to help it by standing aloof from it. You are not going to help by leaving your membership a thousand miles away. You are not going to help by criticizing or throwing stones. If we are not what we ought to be, if we are not doing what we ought to do, then come and help us to do better.

Hobab was to be to them instead of eyes. What a fine vocation! To help folks to see in any realm is magnificent. I remember a teacher of English who was skilled in the fine art of being eyes to his pupils. Prose seemed to become poetry at his touch, and poetry came to be possessed of a more winsome and fascinating music. That is the privilege of the poet. Before the coming of Sidney Lanier what an unsightly spot was the marshes of Glynn! It wearied us with its monotony. It offended us with its croaking. But Sidney Lanier made us to see it as it was. When we saw it, it ceased to croak and began to sing. It became vocal with the love of God.

“As the marsh hen secretly builds on the watery sod,  
Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of God!  
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh hen flies  
In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh  
and the skies:

By so many roots as the marsh grass sends in the sod,  
Behold, I will heartily lay me ahold on the greatness  
of God!

Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness within  
The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of  
Glynn.”

"Thou shalt be to us instead of eyes." To help people to see new beauties in goodness, new beauties in truth, new beauties in holiness, how supremely worth while! We may help them to see even Jesus Christ Himself! Stanley tells us that when he left for Africa he was an atheist. But he came home a Christian. This he did because he had seen Christ in David Livingstone. Livingstone had been to him instead of eyes.

### III

What response did Hobab make to this winsome invitation?

He did not become angry at Moses and tell him to mind his own business. He did not set himself to the task of organizing an army to fight against him and his people. He was not antagonistic in the least. It is highly probable that he wished Moses well in his great undertaking. But this seems to have been his answer—"I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred."

Now, the pathos of his choice was not that he decided upon a base and shameful course. It was rather in the fact that, by his refusal to accept this invitation, he chose the second best when he might have had the best. There is no indication that through this wrong decision he went to the lowest depths. He only failed to reach the fine heights that were within his reach. And my fear for you who turn a deaf ear to the appeal of Christ is not that any great number of you will become rakes or crooks. But it is this rather—that you will become so absorbed in the second best that you will miss the best.

A few years ago a mother who lived near my old home was doing her week's washing. She was out by the well some distance from the house. Upon looking

up from her task, she saw that her house was in flames. She dashed into the burning building and brought out a few quilts. Then back she went and brought out a feather-bed and one or two pillows. Then the house reeled and staggered like a drunken man and fell in ruins. But the screams of this mother sounded above the crash of the building and the roar of the flames. She was remembering too late that she had left her baby asleep in that house.

Now, the tragedy of this mother's blunder was not in the fact that she had saved a feather-bed and a pillow or two. There was no harm in that. It was not that she had saved a few quilts. There is not the least harm in saving quilts. The tragedy was that she became so absorbed in the things of secondary value that she forgot that which was of supreme value. That danger, in one form or another, threatens every one of us. Hence, I call you to the choice of the highest, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

## X

### THE TRIFLER

#### *Matthew 22:5*

"And they made light of it."

#### I

A trifler is not necessarily one who laughs. A man may be full of laughter and full of seriousness at the same time. He may be just as earnest in the telling of a story that will make people smile as in telling one that will make them weep. The fact that his face is full of sunshine does not by any means indicate that he is a trifler.

The truth is that laughter is just as much a part of the divine program as tears. It has a real ministry of helpfulness. If some of us laughed a bit more, we might weep less. If some of us laughed more, we might be more helpful. Do you remember the chaplain in Ralph Connor's story, "The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land"? A torpedo has just been fired and panic is about to break out on shipboard. Suddenly there is a ringing laugh that calls people to their senses. The Sky Pilot has seen something funny and has saved the situation by laughing.

While passing through the ruins of old Dryburgh Abbey in Scotland, the guide pointed out this inscription written in Latin above one of the doors, "Sweeten

Bitter Things with Gentle Laughter." It struck me as a lovely motto. There are many bitter things that we might so sweeten. There are many sobs that we might thus change into psalms. You understand it must be gentle laughter. It must be laughter that is clean and wholesome. There is laughter that is harsh and unkind. There is laughter that is like a sword thrust. There is laughter that has a scourge in its hand. There is laughter that bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. There was something of that element in the laughter of Dean Swift. Thackeray called attention to the fact that it jars upon us after sevenscore years. But gentle laughter is bracing as mountain air and refreshing as the song of the sea.

If you laugh, therefore, do not count yourself, for that reason, as flippant. If you refuse to laugh, do not count yourself, for that reason, a moral giant. There is no virtue in mere solemnity. It is not to your credit to have a face that "creams and mantles like a standing pool." To be defective in a sense of humor is worse than bad eyesight. If to be extremely serious in your demeanor is an infallible mark of greatness, then certainly our moral giants are high-class chauffeurs or head waiters at our leading restaurants.

The trouble with the trifler is not that he laughs. It is just this, that he laughs at the wrong time. Isn't it horrible to tell a joke that is really amusing and have your audience sit as silent as a tomb, then to say something that is tremendously serious and have them laugh? Such laughing would be all right were it not ill-timed. The difference between the trifler and the man of moral earnestness is just this, the trifler treats little things as if they were big, while the earnest man puts first things first.

## II

Now there are some things that ought to be counted as trifles. There are some things that you have a perfect right to make light of.

1. You would do well to make light of the ridicule of those who would laugh you out of your convictions. You would do well to smile at the scorn of the scorner. For instance, the crowd that you work with down at the office does not believe in the church. They care little or nothing for the things that abide. They laugh at you for your loyalty to conscience. Suppose instead of shrinking and surrendering, you laugh back. You had better be laughed at for doing a wise thing than to be applauded for doing a foolish thing.

A few years ago I saw a company of young men taking in the city. After a consultation, they took their way in the wrong direction. One young man walked with them a few steps, hesitated, then stood still on the street corner. They urged him to come on, but he continued to hesitate. Then they began to laugh at him. They accused him of having cold feet. The young fellow could not stand their laughter. He went with them like an ox to the slaughter.

But how foolish he was. In so doing, he showed himself a trifle. He should have made light of their ridicule and of their sneers. But instead, he made light of his own conscience. He made light of his own pure blood in his veins that he had inherited from a pious father and mother. He made light of the high and holy privilege he was to demand on his wedding day. So it is wise to treat as trifles the sneers that come to you as you walk in the path of obedience to your holiest convictions.

2. If you have a handicap, it is well to make light of that. Some of us find ourselves hampered in the race of life. We cannot but recognize the fact that we do not have an even start with our fellows. We have serious defects. But instead of centering our attention upon our defects and grieving over them and neglecting our possibilities, suppose we treat our handicaps as trifles and concentrate on our possibilities.

Do you remember that soldier who, while fighting under the leadership of his Prince, broke his sword? He had fought well until that sword was broken. But now he stood and toyed with the broken blade and said, "It is useless to fight longer. Of course, if I had a good sword like my Prince, I would continue the battle, but with this broken thing, I can do nothing." Therefore, in spite of the fact that he was sorely needed, he threw his broken sword upon the earth and, like the coward that he was, left the field.

The battle raged on. The Prince seemed destined to lose. Hours later, hard pressed and weaponless, he found himself on the exact spot where his craven soldier had stood. He glanced down and his heart leaped for joy as he saw the broken sword. He grasped it with the eagerness of one who delights in battle. He turned upon the foe and wielded it with such effect that he won a glorious victory. And the weapon with which he won it was one so mean that even a common soldier had thrown it away.

3. You would do well to make light of the sacrifices that you have to make in the path of duty. A good soldier does not whine over his hardships nor parade his wounds in the public eye. While the battle is on, if you call attention to the fact that he is bleeding, he will answer, "A little scratch," and continue fighting

even though his life may be ebbing away at that wound. The big thing is the winning of the battle. The hardships to be endured are mere trifles. He makes light of them.

Such a soldier was Paul. He tells us that he had suffered the loss of all things. He had lost his social standing. He had lost his position of leadership in his church. He had lost his wealth, but he does not call our attention to them to show what valuable things he has given up. He only mentions them that by contrast you may see the immensity of the wealth that he has gained. He declares that though he has lost all these things, he does not grieve over his losses. He counts them as trifles. He counts them as mere refuse, utter filth, in comparison with the wealth that he has won in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He made light of his sufferings, he counted it as a light thing to pay the last measure of devotion. "Neither count I my life as dear unto myself that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." That is, the big thing with Paul was not to live. The big thing was to be true to God. The big thing was not simply to dodge death, but it was to avoid that sin that would separate him from God and force him to despise himself for a coward.

### III

But while there are things that we ought to count as trifles, there are others with which we cannot afford to trifle. Let us name a few of them.

1. You cannot afford to trifle with your conscience. There is that in every man that speaks to him telling

him of the things that he ought to do and warning him of those he ought to shun. You never stand at the forks of the road without this voice saying to you: "Avoid the wrong and claim the right. Refuse the downward call, hear the call that leads into the heights." No man can afford to trifle with this monitor. It is the very voice of God speaking within his soul.

To treat your conscience as a trifle is to destroy it. I can toy and play with this watch of mine until it will become utterly unreliable. You can trifle with your conscience until it too will become as useless as a watch that is stopped, or as a speedometer that has been wrecked. No man ever took a first wrong step but that he felt that he ought not to take it. No man ever took a first wrong step but that he felt rebuked when he had taken it. But if you persist, the voice of rebuke is hushed. There is no sin so ghastly but that you can come to commit it with complacency if you only continue to trifle with your conscience.

There is no man but what has felt the upward call. Whatever may be your relation to Jesus Christ to-night, there have been times when you have felt the appeal of his winsome personality. There have been times when you have looked wistfully toward the heights and have longed to ascend. There have been times when the loveliness of goodness cast its spell upon you. There have been times when the call of God rang so alluringly in your soul that you felt yourself saying, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

But you can disregard that voice until it loses its appeal. A young woman said to me some time ago, "The first time I heard you preach, I felt almost irresistibly drawn to accept Christ. But I do not feel that

way so much now." And I could not but answer her, "If you continue to resist, you will feel the appeal less and less. There will come a time when the gospel which once stirred you and wooed you will be as powerless to waken your aspirations and to stir the longings of your heart as if you were in your coffin." It is a fearful thing to trifle with your conscience.

2. You must not trifle with the law of moral retribution. To trifle with any law of God is madness. If I go out to-morrow to trifle with the laws of this physical body by taking bichloride of mercury, that broken law will not argue with me; it will destroy me. If I trifle with the law of gravitation, it will not plead with me; it will wreck me. If I trifle with the law governing electricity, it will not fall on my neck and weep; it will burn me to a cinder. And if I trifle with the law of moral retribution, I will have to pay the price whether I be weak or strong, whether I be high or low, whether I be a king or an outcast.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That is just as true as the law of gravitation. Suppose I am a farmer. You pass by one day where I am sowing. "What seed are you sowing?" you ask. "Seed," I reply. "I don't know what kind of seed. I have been quite busy and have not had time to investigate. The seed may be mustard seed, or wheat, or cotton, or ragweed. But I think everything will come out all right in the end. God is good. He will not allow me to go without the desired harvest when the wintertime comes."

Such conduct would be the conduct of a madman. But I see marks of greater madness than that every day. You are sowing seed, every one of you. You are sowing them in your own lives. You are sowing them

in your homes. You are sowing them in the hearts of your children. You are sowing them in your social circle. What kind of seed are you sowing? What harvest have you a right to expect, you who never pray with your children, you who act as if God were all a myth and the Bible all a fable? You would not think of leaving the question of a wheat harvest to mere chance. But you are not at all afraid to so treat your spiritual harvest.

3. You cannot trifle with yourself. I do not mean by that, this house in which you live. Your body will fall away one of these days. It will become "a brother to the clod which the rude swain turns with his share and treads upon." But your real self, that soul of yours, will abide forever. Therefore you cannot afford to act as if you were only physical. "Man shall not live by bread alone." There is that within you that nobody can satisfy but God.

But there are countless thousands that are living in utter disregard of their own immortality. They are treating their souls as mere trifles. That was the trouble with the rich fool. He knew how to provide for a body, but he had neither thought nor care for making provision for his soul. He had appreciation for fine crops and full barns, but he had no more appreciation for his own soul than a mole would have for a sunrise. Therefore, he made provision for the few days in which his body might live and made absolutely no provision for the eternity in which his soul must live. No wonder God called him a fool.

4. You cannot afford to treat Christ as a trifle. He is the one hope of this battered and sinning world. He is the one hope for you and for me. He is able to save

unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. He is able to save us from sin. He is able to save us from ourselves. He is able to save us to that life that is life indeed. He is able to save us to hope, to usefulness, to power, and love. And bear in mind that He is our only hope. "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

But what multitudes are making light of Christ! Some make light of Him by merely rejecting Him. When He comes to offer you salvation for the taking, you will not have it. When He comes with the offer of Himself, you will not give Him welcome. When He knocks at the door of your heart, you will not even open the door. Every Christ rejecter is treating the God in whose hand his breath is, and whose are all his ways, with a contempt that he could not use towards the poorest friend and keep him as his friend. You are saying by your conduct every day, "Pardon, peace, power, eternal life, Christ Himself, these things are not worth having for the mere taking."

Then we make light of Christ by giving Him the second place. This is especially the sin of the church. The truth of the matter is that many of us treat Christ little better than a beggar. We give him the leavings. He has to take the scraps of our time, the scraps of our interest, the scraps of our endeavor. When we start to pay His bills, we pay them last. The Bible says that the first fruits are the Lord's, but we say the last fruits are the Lord's. That is, after we have attended to our needs and to our luxuries, we will give Him some bit of the leavings. Thus we make light of Him and bring to ourselves spiritual poverty.

## IV

What to your mind are the things most worth while? You can't travel life by every road. Our hands are too small to grasp every prize. What are the things that count with us? Are we interested in the passing and in the chaffy things, or are we interested in the things that are weighty and eternal. What do we count as trifles? the big things or the little things? The answer to that question determines whether we are saved or lost, whether we belong to Christ or do not belong to Him. To put first things first is to have all that life needs for time and eternity. To count the supreme things as trifles is to shut ourselves forever from the feast. "None of these," said the king, "shall taste of my supper."

# XI

## THE DRIFTER

### *Hebrews 1:2*

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard lest at any time we drift away from them."

#### I

These arresting words were addressed to the followers of Jesus Christ. They were written to certain Jews who had broken with Judaism to embrace Christianity. At the time of the writing of this letter these saints were not finding the Christian life easy. Very swift currents were beating upon them that threatened to sweep them from their faith in Christ. Therefore, this inspired writer sent them these strong words of warning: "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard lest at any time we drift away from them."

But while this message was addressed to saints that lived many centuries ago, it is one that is needed by the saints of to-day and of every day. Not only is it needed by those who have committed their lives to Christ, but it is needed even more by those who are yet strangers to Him. It is a warning that is needed by every one of us. It is needed by the old and by the young, by the rich and by the poor, by the cultured and by the uncultured. Every man needs to take heed against the great tragedy of becoming a drifter.

## II

Why do we need this warning?

1. We need it because there are currents in life as there are currents in the earth, and the sea and the air. No man lives his life in a place that is entirely sheltered. No man plies his ship on a landlocked lake that is utterly free from streams and tides. However he may seek to dodge temptation, it is the portion of every man born into the world. Strong currents sweep about you and about me, and we can no more avoid contact with these currents than we can avoid the fact of life.

Take, for instance, the currents that flow toward materialism. From the moment you start to business in the morning, the tides that flow about you tend to sweep you away from the sense of the spiritual and the unseen. How little there is in the world of trade in which you move to remind you that man shall not live by bread alone! How little there is to make real to you the life more abundant! The very spirit of the world in which we live tends to rob us of a sense of the unseen and to make Christ as dim to us as the shadow of a dream.

2. We need this warning in the second place because these swift streams that flow about us make it impossible for us to stand still. Just as it is impossible for us to wholly avoid these strong currents, just so it is impossible for us to stand still in the midst of them. If you do not breast the current, if you do not fight against the prevailing tendency, if you do not struggle up stream, then you will be swept from your moorings and become adrift. There is absolutely no standing still. Either you are becoming better or you are becoming worse. You are either becoming stronger or

you are becoming weaker. You are either drawing closer to God or you are drifting further away from Him.

3. Then we need this warning because drifting is so easy. To conquer self and sin, to be brotherly in the midst of an unbrotherly world, to be clean where it is so easy to be unclean, that means struggle. If you are winning Christ-like character, that means that you are giving your full energy to the task, fortified by the Spirit of Christ. To count in the battle, to be a blessing, that means that you are willing to bleed.

But what is necessary in order to drift? How much effort does that require? Answer: No effort at all. Do you know how to float? All you have to do is to give yourself up to the water as if you were dead. So it is with drifting. What must I do in order to stem the swift currents that sweep about me? I must struggle up stream through the power of God. What must I do to lose my anchorage and become a piece of driftwood? Answer: Nothing, naked nothing.

Now since drifting is so easy it is not without an appeal. This is true because we love the easy way. I know that there is that in the heart of every one of us to which the heroic appeals. But there is also that in our hearts that makes us shrink from paying the price that we must pay in order to win a Christ-like character. We are afraid of the Cross. We do not mind wearing a dainty little cross about our necks. We do not mind adorning our church spires with it. But when it becomes an instrument of torture upon which we are to die to self and to sin and to the world, then we shrink back and want an easier way. And because of this desire for the easy way, we are in constant danger of drifting.

## III

Now drifting is a dangerous and deadly something. This is true for the following reasons:—

1. The man who drifts always goes down hill. If you are morally adrift, you are not drifting toward God, but away from Him. You are not drifting toward purity of heart, but in the opposite direction. You are not drifting toward the Church, but toward the world. You are not drifting toward right, but toward wrong. You are not drifting toward the best, but toward the worst. If you are drifting, you are not drifting toward heaven, but toward hell. Every man who drifts is drifting downward.

2. Drifting is dangerous because it is often an unconscious process. We may drift and be entirely unaware of it. This is true because we generally begin to drift gradually. We are not swept from our moorings and carried over the rapids in an instant. We are not torn from our anchorage and dashed to death in a single moment. Drifting is a foe that steals upon us like a thief in the night. It is an enemy that lurks in ambush and takes us by surprise. It is often so slow in its beginning as to be almost imperceptible. It is often so rapid in the end as to be all but irresistible.

Now, the fact that we may drift without knowing it makes this danger all the more deadly. Had Dr. Jekyll realized at the beginning that it was becoming increasingly easy for him to become Mr. Hyde; had he realized that it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to change from Mr. Hyde to Dr. Jekyll, he might have taken warning and saved himself. But he was not aware of his danger. He did not realize that he was drifting. When at last he did realize it, the cur-

rent in which he had allowed himself to be caught had become too strong for him. He was swept helplessly to a hideous ruin.

To drift at all, therefore, is dangerous. To drift and be ignorant of the fact is more dangerous still. I wonder if you are among that number. Suppose one day I should see you fishing a mile or so above a dangerous rapid. You are in a frail little boat that has slipped its anchor. But you are so intent upon your fishing that you have not noticed it. Now and then a bass strikes at your fly, and in the excitement of the fishing you do not see that you are coming nearer and nearer the rapids. In such case what should I do? I am to give a warning. I am to do everything within my power to keep you from the certain death that is ahead unless you speedily realize your danger.

It is such a warning that I am calling to some of you at this moment. Look at the landmarks along the shore. Do you not see that you are drifting? When you came to the city a few years ago you were an active and earnest Christian. You had no thought of breaking with the Church. But you have left off attendance little by little. Little by little you have forgotten your Bible. Little by little you have drifted out of the habit of prayer. To-night your church membership is in your trunk, or it has lapsed altogether, and you have drifted away from the solemn vows you made to God in the presence of men.

Young man, when you came to the city, you came girded by the moral support that had come from your being reared in a Christian home. When you were saying good-by, your mother slipped a Bible into your hand and told you to make it your daily companion, and to keep your mother's blood pure in your veins.

But you were not in the city long before you began to slip. To-night you are at home in a crowd that a year ago would have disgusted you. To-night you live a life and talk a language that would break your mother's heart. The change has not come to pass in a day. You have drifted into it carelessly through many days.

Then I would bring this same question to you that are in the sweet radiance of young womanhood. What effect has the work in the office, or in the store, what effect have the friendships of the years just past had upon you? Are you as sensitive to the unclean as you once were? Have you kept your modesty unimpaired? Or have you begun to allow petty liberties to be taken with you that have grown into larger liberties till you have parted from something that is worth more than all the diamonds that glitter in the crowns of the world? How many souls are adrift to-night? Drifting away from goodness and away from God and away from laughter and love? And the tragedy is heightened by the fact that they do not realize their terrible danger.

Now, I know what some of you say. You say, "Preacher, you are trying to frighten me." I will not deny it. I wish I could. When I used to study by an old kerosene lamp, I have tried to frighten the foolish candlefly that buzzed about the top of the chimney. Sometimes I succeeded. At other times he laughed at my warning, and I heard him flutter within the furnace as he made his last struggle against death. Look to your moorings and see if all unknown to yourself you have not become adrift.

3. Then drifting is dangerous because, if persisted in, it certainly ends in ruin. This is just as sure as the law of gravitation. Continue to drift and you will

drift into disaster. The greatest vessel that sails the seas is no exception. Even if that great vessel were to let the fire go out in its engines and throw its compass overboard and begin to drift, it would end not in some haven of safety, it would end upon the rocks or at the bottom of the sea. It would become a wreck. This would be the case regardless of how well built it is. It would be the case regardless of its bigness or of its power or of the wealth of its adorning. Should it become a drifter, it would certainly become a wreck. And that is just as true for you as it is for this great ship.

4. Finally, drifting is dangerous because it not only ends in ruin for the drifter, but also because it so often means great hurt to those with whom the drifter comes in contact. The greatest dread of the sea is not the tempest. It is not huge cliffs where ragged waves fight the rugged rocks. The greatest dread of the sea is the derelict. It is the ship adrift, the ship that is bound for no harbor, the ship that is the plaything of the winds and tides.

And that is one of the greatest dangers in our social life. The drifting soul is a menace. What a charming young fellow is James Steerforth in Dickens' great story. He is handsome and magnetic. But there is one great lack. He has no spiritual goal. He is morally adrift. And how does he end? Pass along the shore after the storm. There he lies, his head resting upon his arm as if in sleep. The seaweed is tangled in his curly hair. He is a wreck. He has drifted to his ruin.

But the tragedy of this soul adrift did not end with himself. As he drifted he came into contact with other good ships and the result of that contact was bitter tragedy and heartbreak. He met a winsome vessel

called Little Emily, and a noble ship called Peggotty. These that he met he either wounded sorely or sent upon the rocks. You may drift if you will, but in so doing you become a menace not simply to yourself, but to those you meet on the great high seas of life.

## IV

But there is an antidote against drifting. There is a power that will keep us from ever becoming adrift, or that will enable us to cease our drifting and win against the strong tides even if they have heretofore had the victory. I bring good news. I bring the secret of conquest both for those who have committed their lives to Jesus and for those who have not yet made the great adventure. There is a tendency in every one of us to become a drifter. But there is One who can overcome this tendency and make us conquerors.

Which way does safety lie? Hear these words of inspiration. "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard." We are to find safety, we are to find deliverance by giving heed to the Gospel message. We are to face the fact that drifting is deadly. We are to face the fact that Jesus Christ is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

We are not to hear this story listlessly and indifferently. We are to give heed to it. We are to let it grip our minds and hearts. We are to give earnest heed to it. We are to give more earnest heed to it. The Christian religion is a religion of intense earnestness. To be a lukewarm Christian is to be no Christian at all. To be half-heartedly for Christ is to be against Him. If you are to resist the tendency to drift that has already

laid hold upon you, you are to find that deliverance by a wholehearted surrender to Jesus Christ.

And the time to make that surrender is now. The longer you wait the more difficult it will be for you to conquer the current and gain the victory. Somewhere I read this story: A man standing on the bank of the Niagara River saw a dead sheep being swept down by the current. An eagle lighted upon that sheep. The body sank for a moment under the weight and then came to the surface again. The day was bitter cold and the wool wrapped round the talons of the eagle and began to freeze. Meantime the sheep was being swept more and more rapidly toward the falls.

But the eagle had not the slightest fear. Had you shouted a warning he would possibly have laughed at you. He would have said: "Do not disturb yourself. Do you not see these great wings? There is plenty of time. There is not the slightest danger." And now the great cataract is only a few feet away. The time has come. The eagle spreads his great burnished brown wings and fans the air, but they do not lift him. The frozen wool holds him fast. And while his great wings frantically beat the air, he is swept to his death.

Now there was a time when this eagle could easily have saved himself. He was not made for such an ugly and ignominious fate. He was made for the cloudland and for the upper air. He was made with capacity to spurn the earth and "bathe his plumage in the thunder's home." But he allowed himself the deadly luxury of drifting and the end was disaster. We are made for the highest, but if we drift we, too, shall disappoint our possibilities. We shall end in infinitely greater disaster. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard lest at any time we drift away from them."

## XII

### THE STRADDLER

#### *I Kings 18:21*

“How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

The text is part of one of the most majestic and dramatic scenes of the Old Testament. One day an unexpected visitor appeared at the court of Ahab. He was as unwelcome as he was unexpected, for he rebuked the king and told him to his face that there should not be rain nor dew upon the earth during the coming years except at his word. Then with the key of heaven swung to his girdle, he left the king to nurse his wrath, while he disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him.

The days that followed were terrible and trying days. The gardens all withered. The fields became parched. The fountains dried up. Desolation and death stalked abroad. The whole nation seemed on the point of becoming a desert. Meanwhile, the weak and helpless and enraged king sought everywhere for this prophet on whom he blamed the whole tragic situation.

At last, when more than three years had passed, Elijah suddenly came back. The first man he met was Obadiah. He ordered him to bear the news to Ahab that he had returned. But the mere thought of carrying such a message filled Obadiah with terror. “What sin have I committed,” he asked, “that you send me on a mission like this? While I am gone the Spirit of the

Lord will snatch you away somewhere and my life will be to forfeit."

But Elijah reassured him by saying, "As the Lord God liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to Ahab this day." Thus encouraged, Obadiah went to tell Ahab the great news. When Ahab heard it, I can well imagine that his eyes flashed fire, his cheeks glowed with rage. Now at last he was going to have the pleasure of taking vengeance upon this prophet who had so vexed him and his kingdom during these trying years.

Into the prophet's presence he comes with a great bluster and show of royalty. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" he asks in indignation. At this question he expected to see the prophet's face grow pale and his knees totter with fear. But to his amazement, no such thing happened. Instead, the prophet towered above him as a mountain above an ant heap, as he answered sternly: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have made Israel to sin."

That is, declares the prophet, the trouble with Israel is not Elijah. The trouble with Israel is sin. It is sin that has cut off your water supply. It is sin that has dried up your fountains. It is sin that has parched your fields and withered your gardens. It is the sin of yourself and the sin of your people. The desert that you see about you to-day was born of the moral desert that is within your hearts.

Having thus spoken, Elijah becomes the real king. He orders Ahab to gather the people together to Mount Carmel. The king obeys. He dares not do otherwise. And now the great concourse is gathered. On one side is the king with the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah, and a vast multitude of people. On the other side stands one man, Elijah, the prophet of the

Lord. And it is to this throng that Elijah uttered the words of our text: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

## I

The text is a rebuke. It brings home to Israel the sin of which she is guilty. What charge does the prophet bring against these people? He does not charge them with having wholly forsaken God. He does not charge them with having left off prayer and left off worship altogether. Nor does he charge them with having gone wholly over to Baal. He does not accuse them of having given their hearts unreservedly to this false god. Of course they had given some hospitality to Baal. They had also been somewhat neglectful of God. But the charge is not the wholly forsaking of the one, nor the wholly following of the other.

What then is the charge? The prophet accuses them of being partly for God and partly for Baal. In short, they are straddlers. They are sitters on the fence. They are hitters of the middle of the road. They are the victims of a crippling and ruinous indecision. They are being hampered by a divided allegiance. They belong to the brotherhood of the double-minded. And such, James rightly tells us, are unstable in all their ways.

Now I dare say there is no individual less pleasing to either God or man than the one who cannot make up his mind. The only time in all the Word of God that our Lord is represented as being disgusted is with a crowd of lukewarm straddlers. He declares that He wishes that they were either cold or hot. That is, if we are not going to be out and out for Christ, He

wants us to be out and out against Him. If we are not going to fight with all our might under His banner, then he wants us to enlist under the banner of the enemy. Any position is less hurtful both to the individual taking that position and to Himself than that of indecision.

## II

Why is indecision so harmful?

1. It is harmful because it divides our energies. Decision unifies. When a man can say, "This one thing I do," he is then able to focalize all his powers upon one single object. He is able to utilize the full measure of his strength to the attaining of one certain goal. But the undecided man squanders himself. He sows himself broadcast. His abilities may be great, but even then, he will end in failure if he never reaches a decision.

My wife and I were touring a few years ago. We got lost. We went down the road a distance and then turned back. We turned to the right and then back to the left. At last about ten o'clock in the evening we reached the hotel that we had left in the early afternoon. We had not made as much progress as a decided snail might have made. This was true in spite of the fact that we had an excellent car, and had driven many miles. Our failure was that we did not persist in a single given direction. We did not have a known and definite goal.

There is a story of a hunter who set out one day to hunt for everything in general and nothing in particular. He struck the trail of a deer and followed it for hours. Then he came upon the trail of a fox and decided he would leave the deer and catch the fox. Then

he came to where the trail of the fox was crossed by that of a rabbit. He decided that as it was getting towards night, he would catch the rabbit. About dark he discovered the trail of a mouse. He decided it was too late to catch anything but this mouse. So he followed this trail until it was so dark that he could not see. Then he went home in the night with naked nothing.

Peer Gynt in Ibsen's play is a prize example of the undecided man. He is neither a rank unbeliever nor a genuine Christian. He is busily engaged in doing both right and wrong. For instance, he is carrying on a good trade with the Chinese in rum and idols. But he seeks to atone for this wrong by making occasional contributions to missions. Thus, he says, that for every drunkard he makes, he also makes a Christian well baptized. Thus he squanders his energies, gaining nothing but his own ruin.

2. Indecision is harmful because it tends to lead to inaction. Did you ever see this happen? A man starts across the street when suddenly he is startled by the approach of an auto. He turns quickly back toward the sidewalk that he has just left. Then he decides to make a run for the further side of the street. He ends by standing perfectly still in the middle of the street. Unable to make up his mind, he does nothing. Indecision paralyzes him.

That was the case with that famous donkey that found himself one day between two fragrant bundles of hay. When he was minded to go to feast off bundle number one, the aroma from bundle number two tantalized him. And when he was half decided to go to number two, number one called to him. Thus this

donkey stood midway between these two lovely bundles of hay and starved absolutely to death.

That was the trouble with Hamlet. He could think and think clearly, but he could not act.

"To be, or not to be, that is the question.  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind, to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune;  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And, by opposing, end them?—To die,—to sleep,—  
No more;—and, by a sleep, to say we end  
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die,—to sleep;—  
To sleep! perchance to dream;—ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause. There's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life.

. . . Who'd these fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death—  
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns—puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;  
And enterprises of great pith and moment,  
With this regard, their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action."

3. Not only does indecision lead to inaction, but by leading to inaction, it leads inevitably to wrong action.

This is ever true in a moral question. To refuse to ascend is to descend. To refuse to take a stand on the side of right is to end on the side of wrong. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "He that is not for me, is against me." The opposition that is most harmful to the cause of Christ to-day is not that which grows out of a firm and deliberate purpose. It is that that is born of a lack of a positive decision to be Christ's and Christ's alone.

How strikingly is this illustrated in the case of Pilate. It was never the purpose of Pilate to condemn Jesus. His sense of justice made such a course hateful to him. But the Jews demanded that He be condemned. They even cried to him, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." He could not afford to lose the friendship of Cæsar. But neither could he afford to condemn an innocent man.

For this reason, he decided upon a middle course. He would neither acquit nor condemn. But by refusing to take a positive stand for Christ he did condemn Him. And though he washes his hands in token of the fact that he is guiltless, declaring the while, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see ye to it," we know that all his washing has not been able to cleanse the stain of shame from his name, nor the stain of guilt from his heart. By refusing to take a right stand, he took a wrong stand.

Now since indecision ends in wrong action, it ends in wrong character. Since it ends in wrong character, it ends in a wrong destiny. The man who with full purpose of heart sets himself to evil is in danger of making shipwreck. But the man who drifts into evil for lack of decision, the man who chooses wrong because he is too morally flabby to make a courageous

choice of the right, that man is the surest candidate for ultimate disaster that I know.

## III

Because this is true, it is in no sense surprising that the prophet comes with this earnest appeal for a decision. His first purpose is not to proclaim the merits of his God. Nor is it to proclaim the demerits of Baal. He does not begin by calling attention to the tender dealings of God with them during their historic yesterdays. He makes no mention of their deliverance from bondage. He makes no reference to God's care of them during the wilderness journeys. He does not remind them of their God-given inheritance in the Land of Promise. No more does he point out the failure of Baal, and how moral rottenness must be the inevitable result of his worship. His first plea is that they come to a conclusion, that they decide for the one or for the other.

He is concerned, too, that their decision be a reasoned and reasonable decision. That such might be the case, he puts the issue before them in the simplest form possible. They are not to decide between a thousand opinions. They are to decide between two. The issue is between their respective claims. Having done so, act accordingly. "If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

Now, I am aware of the fact that Baal means nothing to us to-day. But we are still called upon to decide between two opinions. Let us not becloud the issue. I say to that young man, "Are you a Christian?" "No," he answers. "There are so many churches that I cannot decide which one I ought to join." But that is not

the issue at all. The choice is between Christ and the world, between Christ and sin. Fundamentally and finally, it is between life with Christ and a life without Christ.

That is the issue upon which you are to decide to-night. Let us face it intelligently and with open eyes and with open hearts. If you really and truly believe that by rejecting Christ you will bring to yourself an enrichment, a satisfaction, and a personal usefulness, that you could not find if you take Him as your Lord and Master, then as an intelligent and thoughtful man, you ought to reject Him. If you believe that He comes to your life to rob you of the things that are most worth while, then the only reasonable thing that you can do is to refuse to follow Him.

On the other hand, if you believe that Christ represents the best interest of your own personal life, if you believe that He can do for you what none other can do, then you ought to follow Him. If you believe He represents the best interest of your home, if you believe that He represents the best interest of your community, if you are convinced that by following Him you would be able to render a larger service to your friends and to your family, then it is your solemn duty to stand for Him. This you must do or play false to yourself, to your loved ones, to your friends, and to your God.

Now there is not a man here who is not convinced of the supremacy of Christ. You know that He and He alone can meet your deepest needs. You know that He not only can bless you, but that He can make you a blessing. He can not only enrich you, but He can make you a means of enrichment to others. Therefore, the most reasonable word that I can possibly say to you is this word of the prophet, "How long halt ye between

two opinions? If God be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the most reasonable thing that any man can do is to heed that ringing challenge by a wholehearted decision for Christ.

## XIII

### THE DISTANT DISCIPLE

#### *Matthew 26: 58*

"But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end."

#### I

"But Peter followed Him." That speaks well of Peter. It puts him in a class almost entirely to himself. There were those present who were the bitter enemies of Jesus. They were thirsting for His blood. They were hating Him with a hatred that would not endure His remaining on the earth. But Peter was not of this hostile and hating crowd.

Then, there were those present who had little or no interest in Jesus. They were neither His friends nor were they His enemies. They were not there either to fight Him or to protect Him. They were there merely as sightseers. They thought there was going to be a rather interesting show. Therefore they determined to see the show. But in Jesus Himself they had no personal interest whatsoever. But Peter was not of the crowd of the indifferent.

"But Peter followed Him." He was therefore a disciple. He was a friend of Jesus. He really loved Him with a passionate devotion. Had this not been

the case he would not have dared to follow Him at this time. Every other disciple had forsaken Him and had fled, with the exception of John. It is to Peter's credit, therefore, that in this hour of trial and testing, in this hour when others forsook Him and fled, Peter yet followed Him.

## II

But the remainder of the text is disappointing. This is true because it tells us how Peter followed Jesus. There are different ways of following Him, you know. We may follow in closest intimacy. We may so follow Him as to be continuously conscious of the inspiration of His presence. We may so follow as to bring gladness to His heart and abiding courage and blessing to our own. We may also follow fearfully, distantly and half-heartedly. It was so with Peter. He was still a disciple, but he was not walking in the bracing intimacy of his Master's presence. He was a distant disciple. "But Peter followed Him afar off."

This story becomes increasingly interesting when we remember how many disciples there are that are just like Peter. There are multitudes among us who are members of the Church, who follow Christ after a fashion, but follow Him afar off. They have not renounced their allegiance; they would not think of turning from their faith altogether, yet they are utterly wanting in enthusiasm. There is no wholehearted devotion. There is no passionate pressing to the side of their Master. They are religious, but there is a deadness about their religion that makes it very barren and very lacking in winsomeness. They follow, but they follow afar off.

## III

How did Peter come to be a distant disciple? I do not think, for a moment, that he made up his mind that he was going to be such. He never sat down and deliberately decided that he would be a half-hearted and useless disciple. Few of us do that. Almost every one before coming into the Church expects to count for something once he becomes a member. Few decide in advance on a life of uselessness. Few determine ahead of time that they are going to be only halfway surrendered. But many drift into such a position little by little. Oftentimes they become distant disciples before they are aware of it. They drift into it unconsciously.

1. The first factor that brought about Peter's separation from his Master was his self-sufficiency. Christ knew his weakness and undertook to warn. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night, for it is written I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." But this statement did not startle Peter in the least. It rather made him bristle. He answered, not without indignation, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." You see, he is absolutely sure of himself. What he says virtually is this: "Lord, you are entirely mistaken about me. You have no proper estimate of my strength and of my loyalty. My sturdy brother Andrew may go back on you. Moody and pessimistic Thomas may fail you, James and John, even though they are sons of thunder, may prove disloyal, but I will not. I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."

Now, self-sufficiency is never a means of bringing us close to our Lord. Those who approach Him must

always approach by the pathway of humility. We do not come to Him except through a sense of need. The Pharisee that went up into the Temple to pray was quite a decent man, but how far he was from God. His self-sufficiency put an impassable barrier between him and the One to whom he prayed. The publican, on the other hand, in spite of his evil past, came immediately into God's presence. This he did because he had nothing to plead for himself except that he was the most needy and sinful man in the world.

Not only is self-sufficiency a barrier that shuts us out from God, but because it does this, it is a most fruitful source of spiritual weakness. God cannot help a man who does not desire His help. If you feel yourself able to conquer in your own strength, then your own strength is all that you will have. It has been demonstrated over and over again that pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

2. The second step in Peter's separation from Christ was his failure to obey. Disobedience always puts a barrier between us and Him. The truth is that sin is all that ever separates between man and God. It is the great divider. The first thing that sin ever did was to put a barrier between man and his Maker. It does the same to-day. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear."

The particular form that Peter's disobedience took was his failure to pray. You remember how Jesus had led Peter and James and John into the inner precincts of the garden and had said to them, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." Jesus knew the

ordeal that was ahead of them. He knew the terrible testing soon to come upon them. He knew that if they approached that testing prayerless, they would approach it powerless. Hence He urged upon them the necessity of prayer. But while they should have prayed, they slept. Therefore, when the ordeal of the arrest came, they were not ready. Prayer is a means of realizing Christ. It is a means of keeping in touch with Him. The prayerless disciple will always be a distant disciple. You cannot neglect the place of prayer and stay in intimate touch with your Lord. It is an utter impossibility.

3. The final reason for Peter's separation was his fear. Had Peter prayed aright he would doubtless have stood firm in this hour of testing. But failing to pray, he was wanting in courage. He was not so panic-stricken that he utterly deserted, but he dared not follow Jesus too closely. He was afraid that he might be identified with Him. He was afraid that he might have to share His cross. He was too devoted to his Master to utterly forsake Him. But he was too fearful to follow closely enough to either receive or give any help.

#### IV

What was the outcome of this following at a distance? It ended in utter failure. This was the case for the following reasons:

1. It put Peter in a hostile crowd. He no longer walked in the fellowship of Jesus. He was no longer finding his companions among the servants of his Master. Those among whom he walked were the servants of the high priest. They did not believe in Jesus; they

thought Him an imposter. They did not love Him; they hated Him. Thus Peter found himself in an exceedingly trying situation. The atmosphere about him was tense with hate. It was chilly with scorn and contempt and ridicule. This chilling atmosphere enveloped Peter and penetrated to the very marrow of his bones. It dampened the ardor of his enthusiastic loyalty and made it easy for him to become a coward and a liar.

What power there is in an atmosphere. I do not think that we have ever appreciated its real might. You can live in a wrong atmosphere till your taste for the things of the spirit is in a large measure lost. You can live in a wrong atmosphere till the heavenly manna becomes an insipid and nauseating thing. You can live in a wrong atmosphere till your moral sense is blunted, till you lose your capacity to be shocked. You can dwell there till the most hideous and disgusting vice seems altogether normal and natural and a thing to be desired.

Now it is often necessary to invade the enemy's territory. God can keep you in any sort of modern Babylon if you go there at His call. But if you go there from choice, then you are playing the fool. No man can go into the devil's territory for his amusement and keep in intimate touch with Christ. No Samson can laugh and carouse with the inhabitants of Gaza without losing his power. Herod did not want to murder John. He did not want to keep his foolish oath. Renegade though he was, he might never have committed this foul crime had he not put himself in such a bad crowd. He did the deed for the sake of those who sat with him. He and Peter and some of us illus-

trate the truth spoken by the wise man: "The companion of fools shall be destroyed."

2. Following at a distance, Peter lost his faith. It was impossible for him to live in a hostile crowd, separated from his Master, and at the same time keep his faith unshaken. Hence we read of him this pathetic word: "Peter went in to the high priest's palace and sat with the servants." What for? To give the Master the encouragement of his personal presence? No. To make good his promise that he was willing to go with Him both to prison and to death? No. He went in and sat with the servants to see the end. That was it. He had lost his faith.

To see the end! So it has come to this for Peter? He had made a great confession one day. He had said to this Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." But Peter has decided now that he was mistaken. Jesus had told him that He was going to build His church and the gates of hades should not prevail against it. But Peter has reached the conclusion that the gates of hades have already prevailed. His hopes have vanished, there is no expectation for to-morrow, his dreams are dead. There is nothing for him to do but to sit down among the enemies of Jesus "to see the end."

3. With the going of Peter's faith, his courage went also. He had already been made very much afraid at the arrest of Jesus. But now utter panic overwhelms him. A servant girl asks him if he is not a disciple. He is evasive and declares that he does not understand her. The question is asked a second time. This time he emphatically denies that he knows Jesus at all. When the question is asked a third time he begins to curse and to swear. Why so? Men do not dare mightily

for that in which they have lost all faith. When we believe mightily, we are courageous. When we cease to believe, we become cowards.

Why the difference between Caleb and Joshua and the ten other spies who went with them? Why were the two courageous and the ten cowardly? The difference was a difference of faith. The ten saw the giants and only the giants. Therefore they themselves seemed as grasshoppers. Caleb and Joshua also saw the giants, but they saw them through God. They did not look at God through their difficulties, they looked at their difficulties through Him. Therefore they were able to say, "Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able. These giants will be but bread for us."

What a chance Peter missed. What a help he might have been to his Master. But instead of being a help, he was only a hindrance. How much it might have meant to these misguided servants of the high priest if Peter had only stood true. But as it was, he helped to confirm them in their unbelief and in their wicked rebellion against Christ. The distant disciple is seldom an asset, he is usually a liability. He does not end in victory, he ends in disaster. He does not honor his Lord, he only denies Him.

This has been the experience of many among ourselves. I do not mean by this that we have ever declared with an oath that we did not know Jesus. We declared it in a way that is often more emphatic and more hurtful. We declared it by the lives that we live. When there was a battle for righteousness and we took no part, that was a way of saying, "I do not know Him." When law was being trampled underfoot and you did not protest, but winked at it, then you denied Him. When an opportunity came to live somewhat as

He lived, to invest your means and your life according to His will and you refused, then you said that you knew Him not, When you were found at the place of pleasure and never at the place of prayer, then again you said, "I know not the Man."

## V

But in spite of his failure Peter has a message for us that is rich in hope. He tells us in the most emphatic way that the man who followed afar off yesterday may enter into the intimacy of his Master's fellowship to-day. He gives us a new insight into the infinite approachableness of our Lord. He tells us that there is a place at His side even for those of us who have denied Him. Jesus passed by and looked at him. That look broke Peter's heart. You can hear his pathetic sobbing across the centuries. Never, I think, was a man more penitent. Peter died during those awful hours to his self-sufficiency and self-importance.

Not only did Peter die, but he rose again into newness of life. He found his way once more into his Master's friendship. He could hardly wait to get the door of His tomb opened to send Peter a special message. "Go tell my disciples and Peter." Not only so, but He gave Peter a private interview. "The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared unto Simon." What took place in that interview we are not told, but we can be sure of something that was said. Peter poured out his whole wretched story before Jesus. Jesus listened and forgave and forgot. From that interview Peter came wearing a different garb from that he had ever worn before. He was wearing the garb of humility. He found that it fitted him especially for close fellow-

ship with his Master. Hence he commends it to you and me. "Be clothed with humility," he writes, "for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

Wearing this garment, Peter went forth into the fellowship of his Lord to his marvelous ministry. It was in this costume that he preached in the house of Cornelius. It was in this garb that he received his stripes and thought it an honor that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. It was in this garb that he went into prison. It was wearing the same royal robe that he at last went to the cross. I think he still wore it as he ascended on high to dwell forever in the intimate presence of Him whom he had at one time followed afar off.

## XIV

### THE MAN WITH AN ALIBI

*Luke 14: 18*

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse."

#### I

These people have been invited to a feast. For some reason they do not wish to attend. "Therefore," says the story, "they all began with one consent to make excuse." An excuse, you see, has to be made. An alibi is a manufactured article. They had their reasons for not desiring to go to this particular feast. But they did not wish to make their reasons known. Hence, they came forward with their mouths full of excuses. One has bought some land, another some oxen, another has married. Therefore, they cannot come.

Now this brings us face to face with the fundamental purpose of an alibi. What is an excuse for? We pretend that its purpose is to explain the facts, to tell why we acted or failed to act after a certain fashion. The truth of the matter is that its purpose is just the opposite. It is to conceal the facts. It is to cover up the motives that lie behind our conduct. When we wish to explain we give a reason. When we wish to conceal, we make excuses. An alibi, therefore, has only one purpose, and that is to hide the facts.

First, it is to conceal the facts from others. One day you received an invitation to a party. You did not like the one who was giving this entertainment. You

thought she was beneath you socially, or if this was not the case, you knew of some one who was going to be present with whom you did not care to associate. But when you replied to that invitation, you did not tell your real reason for refusing. You did not say that you thought yourself socially above your hostess or certain of her guests. You did not state that you had a grudge against her or some one else. What you gave was not a reason, but an excuse. You pleaded sickness or previous engagement, or that you were going to be out of the city. Thus you sought to hide the facts from the one who had been courteous enough to invite you.

The same is true oftentimes in our sports. Your opponent beats you at tennis, but it was not because of his skill. You had a broken string in your racquet, or the sun was in your eyes, or you had had a sleepless night. When you lost the golf game, you were trying out some new sticks. When the baseball game went against you, it was the fault of the umpire. When the football game ended in defeat, it was because of the referee. This is the way we talk when we want to make other folks think higher of us than they ought to think.

Second, an alibi is often used to conceal the facts from ourselves. There are some things that we know about ourselves that are so distasteful and disgusting that we have to conceal them from ourselves by plausible excuses. We must bury certain of our sins under an avalanche of alibis in order to save ourselves from a heavy burden of self-contempt. Thus, when you drove that sharp bargain you quieted your conscience by saying, "He would have done me the same way if he could," or "Business is business." When you walked the path of pitch, you soothed your self-loathing by say-

ing, "It is nothing more than what the other fellow is doing every day."

## II

Now it is significant that the facts that we wish to conceal by our alibis are as a rule the unpleasant facts. We do not offer excuses for our virtues, but for our vices. You seldom hear a man give credit to some far-off ancestor for whatever is of worth in himself. It is rare to find a man who is good enough sportsman to say that he only won the game because the umpire made an error or because his opponent was put at a disadvantage. We do not seek alibis for our merits and for our goodness. We rather seek them for our demerits and for our sins.

For this reason, the offering of an excuse is as a rule an acknowledgment of failure. Whenever you hear a man offer an alibi, it means that he has fumbled the ball. It means that he has lost the game. It means that he has been guilty of some kind of defeat. It may have been a defeat in some athletic sport, the outcome of which was of quite trifling importance. It may have been a defeat in some moral struggle, the outcome of which will ultimately mean the loss of his soul. But regardless of the importance of the battle lost, the man with his mouth full of excuses, by this very fact, tells us that he has failed.

Now the moral failures that we make are of two kinds. First, they are the wrongs of which we are guilty, the positive violations of God's law. When we find ourselves guilty of doing the unclean or the unkind or the unjust thing, unless our consciences are wrecks, we feel like offering some explanation for our conduct, both to others and to ourselves. For instance, a man

was swearing profanely the other day. Upon recognizing the preacher, he apologized by telling of the hard crowd with which he has had to associate for the past years. He felt that his conduct was so wrong that its ugliness must needs be concealed by some excuse.

Second, we feel constrained to offer an excuse for the right things we have failed to do. You were once active in the Church, but you have been in this city for years and have never moved your membership. For such conduct you must give some kind of explanation to yourself and others. But your explanation is not a reason, but an excuse. You have allowed your habit of prayer to be crowded out. You have neglected God's Word. Your family altar has fallen into ruins. Or maybe you have lived in open neglect of Jesus Christ. For this, too, you feel that you must offer some kind of an excuse.

### III

What are our excuses? They are as plentiful as the leaves of the forest. They are as numberless as the stars of the heavens. They are like the sands of the seashore, innumerable. However poor we are in every other respect, there is not a man of us but that is rich in excuses. Let me name a very few of them.

#### 1. The wrong that was unintentional.

How often, when brought face to face with some sin that we have committed, do we say, "I really did not mean any harm." That is, you did not do wrong of deliberate purpose. You did not sin because your heart was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. You did not sin because you were selfish and disregardful of the rights of others. You did not sin because the thoughts of your heart were only evil and that contin-

ually. The sin you committed was done without any evil intent whatsoever.

That was the case with Aaron's sin. Moses was away on the mount, you remember. He was dealing personally with God in the heights. But while he was away his congregation was playing the mischief. They came to Aaron and said, "Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, we know not what has become of him." So Aaron, instead of refusing, instead of rebuking their sin, yielded to them. Thus he became a partner in their wickedness. He took their gold and melted it and made for them a golden calf. Then they gave way to a veritable orgy of idolatry and lust.

Suddenly Moses comes upon the scene. He brings his weak brother face to face with the idol that he has made. He asks him to account for his conduct. But Aaron, instead of telling the facts and confessing his sin, makes this amazing statement, "I cast the gold into the fire and, behold, there came forth this calf." He speaks as if he were utterly surprised. To hear him you would think that the last thing he expected to come out of that fire was that calf. He might have looked for the gold to burn up or to turn suddenly into an angel, but never into a calf.

Now the plain fact in the case is that Aaron is not telling the truth. He is trying to conceal his sin from Moses. He is trying to cover up his idol and his own folly by a plausible alibi. His conduct he declares was altogether innocent. He merely cast some gold into the fire. The outcome he must confess was very ugly and very tragic. But of course that was not his fault. He really meant no harm. Therefore, he is not a coward. He is not an idolater. He is not a sinner

against God. He is a decent fellow whose innocent deed has turned out badly.

But Aaron's excuse is a very lame one. Of course he did not mean all the consequences of his sin. We seldom do. He only meant the sin. That is the case exactly. When that young man stepped aside, he did not mean to poison the blood and blind the eyes of the child that was yet unborn. He did not mean the consequences, he only meant the sin. When the prodigal son left home for the far country, he was not seeking to break his father's heart nor to wreck his own life. He did not mean the consequences. He only meant the sin. But the fact that we do not mean the consequences does not save us from our guilt. It did not save Aaron. It will not save you and me.

2. The second alibi I mention is that of necessity. "I have sinned, it is true, but I could not help it." Such would have been the plea of Esau had you met him the day after he sold his birthright. "Esau, did you sell your spiritual privileges for a dish of beans?" "Yes," he would have to answer, "but I am not to blame. I was hungry. I was about to die of sheer starvation."

The man of one talent belongs to the same school. He hid his lord's money in the earth. He did absolutely nothing with what had been entrusted to him. And what was his alibi? Just this, that his lord was a hard man, he reaped where he had not sown. He would not give him a square deal. It was, therefore, utterly impossible for him to live up to his lord's unjust demands.

This was the case of these who were invited to the feast in our present story. They wanted it understood that they were eager to come to the feast, but there were

circumstances that made their attendance impossible. One had bought a piece of land, another had bought some oxen and the third had got married. Therefore, they simply could not come. They were eager to come, but the situation made their coming impossible. Hence, they were not to blame. They were simply the victims of stern necessity.

There are multitudes like this both in the Church and out. They would like to be Christians but they are so situated that it is impossible. They would like to hear the call of God. They would like to be soldiers of the Cross, but there are so many other calls, there are so many conflicting duties. They have so many other responsibilities. They remind you of that soldier who was set to guard a certain notable prisoner. The keeping of that prisoner was so important that the soldier was told that in case his prisoner escaped, his own life would be forfeited. However, when in spite of this stern warning, the prisoner was allowed to escape, his answer was this, "While thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." That is, this guard had so many petty duties to look after that he neglected his supreme duty.

Now you and I have one supreme duty. There are many things that we should like to do. There are many fields in which we should like to serve. But there is one thing that we must do. What that is, we learn from the lips of Jesus: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." The man who puts **first** things first will win things of secondary importance. But the man who puts things of secondary importance first will certainly lose the thing of supreme importance. The pressure upon you may be very hard. Circum-

stances may seem strong against you, but no circumstances can possibly excuse sin against God and against your fellows and against your own soul. Sin is never a necessity.

3. The most popular alibi of all, I think, is to blame the other fellow. That habit began on the very first page of human history. Adam has openly and knowingly broken the law of God. Confronted with the fact, he refuses to accept any guilt whatsoever. He lays it all on the woman. Eve in her turn lays it all on the devil. So both are guiltless. They are guiltless forsooth because they have done wrong at the invitation of somebody else. But nobody can compel you to sin. The only doorknob to your heart, as has been pointed out, is on the inside. The devil cannot get into your life unless you desire his presence. He knocked at the heart of Joseph, but Joseph did not have to yield. He might have done so and blamed the whole thing on the one who tempted him. But instead, he answered with majestic courage, "Can I do this great evil and sin against God?"

Another form of this same excuse is to blame the crowd. That is what Saul did. When he disobeyed God, he refused to confess it. He declared that it was not his fault, but the fault of the people. They demanded it of him and he had to obey. This, too, is about as old as man. Why are you not a Christian? "The crowd I run with makes it impossible." That is one answer. Or, "The crowd that is in the Church is so unfaithful. There are so many hypocrites among them." That is an excuse that has been on the lips of millions. But no man ever made it that was not a hypocrite himself.

One of the meanest forms this excuse can possibly

take is to blame those who have done their best to help you. This is the case with the man who declares that the reason he is in sin is that he had too much church-going when he was a boy. Robert G. Ingersoll made such disgraceful slandering of pious parents popular in his day. He declared that his Puritan father made him an infidel. And since then thousands of petty pinheads have offered the same excuse.

Now the man who says that the reason he does not go to church to-day is because he had to go to church when he was a boy may be telling the truth. But the chances are at least nine hundred and ninety-nine to one that he is not. If you could not write your name, you would not plead as an excuse the fact that your father sent you to a writing school when you were a boy. If you were ignorant, you would not give as an excuse the fact that your father sent you to the best institutions of learning. And your reason for the neglect of God and His Church is not because of too much religious influence in childhood. It is because, in spite of all the efforts that those who loved you made to win you, you have continued to love your sin better than anything else in the world.

#### IV

Now the trouble with the man with an alibi is that he is headed toward ruin. This is true for the following reasons:

1. The man who excuses himself for his sin will never see himself as he really is. It is a great day when we dare to face the facts about ourselves. If you do not realize that you are ignorant, you will never seek to learn. If you do not realize that you are sick,

you will not seek a physician. If you do not realize your sin, you will not seek a Saviour. To excuse our sin is dangerous because it blinds us to our real condition.

2. The habit of excusing ourselves is dangerous in the second place because, since it blinds us to our real condition, it makes real repentance impossible. When the Pharisee went into the Temple to pray, he needed God quite as much as the publican. But he was not conscious of it. He had no true vision of his own heart. Hence, there was no sense of need. There was no real repentance. Repentance remains an impossibility until we see ourselves somewhat as God sees us.

3. Excusing ourselves is tragic, last of all, because, by robbing us of repentance, it robs us of salvation. Christ will save any man who repents. This is true regardless of how weak that man is. It is true regardless of how far he has gone into sin. It is equally true that he cannot save any man who will not repent. This is true regardless of how decent, or how respectable, or how moral that individual may be. "Except you repent," said Jesus, "you shall all likewise perish." "But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God help us to fling away our excuses and to realize that the prayer of the publican fits every one of us: "God be merciful unto me, a sinner."

## XV

### THE FRIEND OF CÆSAR

#### *John 19: 12*

"If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

"If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." That was the deciding word. That was the knockout blow. That was the final and fatal shot. There had been some hope for Pilate up to this time. True, he had allowed himself to be browbeaten by the crowd. He had allowed himself to become "a creature of shifts and devices." But still he was fighting. He was fighting for his own life. He was fighting for the life of his Prisoner. But when that word was shouted at him, he capitulated. He tossed his Prisoner to the hungry wolves and consigned himself to an immortality of shame.

Pilate's name is stained with blood. Worse still, it is stained with the blood of Christ. Yet it is impossible for us to feel toward Pilate as we do toward those who were partners with him in his crime. Against Caiaphas and his party we can feel nothing but burning indignation. The hot fires of envy in the heart of this man dry up all possible tears of compassion. But we are sorry for Pilate. We find ourselves wishing that we might help him. Partner in the crucifixion of our Lord though he was, we could weep over him, if we could find any tears bitter enough.

Why do we feel pity for Pilate? Why do we not

burn with indignation against him as we do against those churchmen that urged him to this cruel deed of injustice? It is because we cannot fail to recognize that there was much good in Pilate. He had a conscience. He had a sense of justice. He wanted to do right. Under circumstances less compelling, he would have done right. Pilate's case is all the more pathetic because he came so near to doing something fine and heroic that would have made his memory sweet forever.

But Pilate threw away his chance. He missed his opportunity. He failed miserably and shamefully. His memory is not sweet. It is the very opposite. Every time we repeat our Creed, we are reminded of his terrible downfall and ruin. The world can never forget that He "suffered under Pontius Pilate." How did Pilate come to make the terrible and tragic failure that he made? The steps that he took toward ruin are easily traced.

## I

Pilate's first blunder was made when he tried to be neutral. He saw at once that if he decided against Jesus he was going to do a deed of gross injustice. He saw also that if he decided for Him, he was going to make powerful and unscrupulous enemies. He knew that these Jews were bent on the death of Jesus. He knew that they would go to any length to accomplish their purpose. He knew further that should he disappoint them, they would do all in their power to make his position difficult. He knew that they would leave nothing undone to accomplish his downfall.

For this reason he decided that the wise course for him to take was to have nothing to do with Jesus at all. Thus when the Jews made their first appeal to him

in the early morning, his answer was this, "Take Him and judge Him according to your law." Pilate does not want anything to do with the matter. "I do not care," he seems to say, "to have anything to do with this case. I desire to wash my hands of the whole perplexing business. Take Him and judge Him yourselves and leave me alone. I want nothing to do with the question at all."

But these Jews do not have the right to inflict the death penalty and the death penalty is what they are determined to have. Therefore they reply by charging Jesus with treason. They declare that He is a pretender. "He claims to be a King. He is therefore a rival to Cæsar." Pilate does not believe this. But he dares not refuse to investigate. Therefore he has the Prisoner brought into the palace.

Then it was that Pilate came face to face with Jesus. It is probably the first time that they have met. Pilate is taken by surprise. He is awed and bewildered. Friendless and defenseless as is this Prisoner, Pilate feels strangely afraid in His presence. "Art thou a King?" he asks. But he does not expect an affirmative answer. He has never seen a King that in the least resembles this man.

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me?" Jesus answers. He is probing Pilate's soul. He is looking into the inner deeps of the man. He is appealing to him. He is pitying him. He is loving him. He is trying to win him. Therefore he is seeking to lift the conversation out of the realm of hearsay into the realm of personal experience. "Pilate, are you talking the language of speculation or of personal experience? Am I your King? Do you accept me as your King and Lord and Master?" Pilate is

feeling more deeply than he desires to feel; therefore he tries to shake off the spell with a haughty answer.

“Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?” Jesus answers, “My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews” “Thou art a King then?” said Pilate. “Certainly I am a King,” is the reply of Jesus. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world that I might bear witness to the truth.” “Pilate,” He seems to say, “I am a King in the realm of truth, I would like to enroll you as a subject.” And as another has said, He opened the door to Pilate and invited him to enter.

But Pilate is skeptical. “A King in the realm of truth.” All his life Pilate has heard the word “truth” bandied from lip to lip. He has heard truth discussed but he has never seen it incarnated, at least not until now. He, with others of his class, has given up faith in the religion of his own people. He is an agnostic. He seriously doubts if it is possible to know the truth. Therefore, not jestingly, nor earnestly, but in blank despair, he asks, “What is truth?” He tarries not for an answer because he feels that there can be no answer.

But he is at least sure of one thing, and that is that this Jesus is not guilty of the charge laid against Him. He is convinced beyond a doubt that this man who claims to be a King in the realm of truth is no rival of Cæsar’s. Therefore he goes back to tell the Jews that he finds the Prisoner not guilty. But they refuse to hear him. They shout that Jesus is guilty. That He has stirred up the people all over the country, even from Galilee.

When Pilate hears the word "Galilee" it gives him hope. Then it is that he makes his second effort to get Christ off his hands. Since Jesus is a Galilean, He belongs to Herod's jurisdiction. He will send Him to Herod. Thus he will save himself from a most embarrassing and perplexing situation. But Herod and his soldiers, after mocking Him and setting Him at naught, send Him back. Pilate has hardly finished congratulating himself before Christ is on his hands again. And the Jews are still clamoring for His blood.

But Pilate has not yet exhausted his resources. He remembers that it is customary for the governor at this season to release a prisoner. The people themselves have the right to choose who the prisoner is to be. But Pilate now limits their choice. He only gives them the privilege of choosing either one of two. He picks out a man that he believes they will be furthest from choosing. His name is Jesus Barabbas. He is a renegade, a robber and a murderer. "The choice," he declares, "must be between Barabbas and Christ. Which will you have? Jesus, the Christ, or Jesus Barabbas?" The crowd cried "Barabbas."

Pilate is exasperated. He is out of patience. He is fearful and unmanned. "What then am I to do with this Jesus which is called Christ?" The question is well put. He has tried desperately to do nothing at all. He has tried to shift his responsibility. He has tried to put the decision into other hands. He has tried to lay the responsibility on other shoulders. But he cannot do it. The decision is up to him. However reluctant he is, he must do something. He must act. Therefore, it is altogether fitting that he ask this question. "What shall I do, then, with this Jesus which is called Christ?"

Neutrality was impossible for Pilate. It is equally impossible for you and me. Every man is born into the world with Christ on his hands. You cannot avoid Him. You cannot dodge Him. You cannot straddle the issue that He brings. You may decide against Him. You may do the wrong thing with Him. You may reject Him. But this is surely true, you must do something. Something every man must do. Therefore the question of bewildered and fearful Pilate is also your question and mine. Ask it for yourself!—what shall I do then, with this Jesus, which is called Christ?"

## II

Pilate's second blunder was his decision to compromise. When he found that he must do something with Jesus he decided that he would pursue a middle course. Justice demanded that he set Jesus free. Pilate recognized that fact clearly. Again and again, he had pronounced Him innocent. Since He was innocent, there was no punishment due. There was only one rightful course for Pilate and that was to release Him.

But this course was not without its difficulties. Pilate shrank from the execution of an innocent man. But he could not shut his eyes to the fact that if he refused it was likely to make endless trouble for him. It might mean the loss of his position and power. It might mean the loss of everything. Therefore, Pilate reasoned thus with himself: "I will not do the dastardly deed that these Jews demand at my hands. I will not crucify a man that I know is not guilty. No more will I release Him. I will not because I dare not. But I will compromise. I will scourge Him and then let Him go."

When Pilate decided to scourge Jesus he knew that he was doing a deed of desperate injustice. He knew that he was inflicting a horrible penalty upon an innocent man. But he thought that this might save Him from the even worse injustice of delivering Him to be crucified. His conscience rebelled, but he quieted it by telling himself that he was choosing the lesser of two evils. He persuaded himself that when the Jews looked upon the Prisoner after this awful punishment had been inflicted, even they would be satisfied.

But here again Pilate was doomed to disappointment.

"Behold the Man," he cries as Jesus is led forth with bleeding body and thorn-crowned brow. The word is an appeal to their sympathy. Pilate is saying, "Look how terribly He has suffered already. Surely this is enough to satisfy even your insatiable lust for blood." It is also an unconscious tribute to Jesus. "Behold the Man. Look how patient He is. How courageous. How strong. How marvelously heroic. Look at Him. Surely, wolves that you are, you are satisfied now."

But they were not satisfied. Having compelled Pilate to compromise, they now feel confident of ultimate victory. To compromise on a moral question is always to head toward failure. To undertake a middle course between right and wrong is to end in disaster. There is no middle ground in dealing with Jesus. If you will not accept Him, you must, in the nature of things, reject Him. If you will not be for Him, you must be against Him. If you will not let Him into your heart you must keep Him shut out. He Himself says as much. "He that is not for me is against me and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

So Pilate makes his appeal. But it is all in vain. The only reply is, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Then

these Jews give an additional reason why Jesus ought to be put to death. "We have a law and by our law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God." That had the opposite effect on Pilate from what they intended. It was an additional reason to Pilate for releasing Him. Pilate had been afraid up to this time. He was more fearful now. Skeptic that he was, he was half persuaded that this strange Prisoner was more than human.

With this fear and uncertainty upon him, Pilate goes for another conference with Jesus. "Whence art thou?" he asks. But Jesus makes no reply. If the only hospitality you give to the truth is to scourge it, then the truth will become silent to you. Christ never spoke to Herod. Herod had sinned against the light until he had lost his capacity to see. If we live up to the light we have, we will come into the fullness of the light. But if we turn our backs upon the light, we will end in utter darkness.

"Speakest thou not unto me?" asked Pilate. "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee?" What a confession for Pilate to make. A little later he is going to declare himself wholly innocent of the blood of this Man. But here he is giving the lie to this declaration. He has the power to crucify or to release. He has the power to accept or reject. Such power is in your hands and mine. There is no man that cannot be a friend and follower of Jesus if he wants to be.

### III

From this interview, Pilate went out with a determination to do his duty. He must release Jesus at all

cost. His foes understood his determination, therefore they struck their strategic blow. "If thou let this Man go," they shout at him, "thou art not Cæsar's friend." Pilate hears and shudders. He goes hot and cold. Christ or Cæsar! A choice must be made between these two. He hesitates. Then he makes his final blunder. He chooses Cæsar. Jesus is flung to His enemies, justice is outraged, and Pilate has lost the fight. Poor defeated man. He never intended that it should end like this. But refusing to take a positive stand for Jesus, he ended by taking a positive stand against Him.

Christ or Cæsar! That was the question before Pilate. It is the question before you and me. It is a question that in its essential nature remains unchanged through all the changing years. Will you choose Christ or will you choose Cæsar? Will you hear the voice of conscience or the voice of the crowd? Will you be ruled by the demands of right or by the claimant voices of expediency? Will you give ear to the call of your deepest convictions or will you yield to the enervating voices of selfish inclination? Will you be ruled by the spirit of the age or by the spirit of the Cross? Christ or Cæsar. It is our supreme question. Upon its right answer depends our defeat or failure, our hope or despair, our heaven or hell. Pilate had his chance and threw it away. To-night you and I have ours.

Christ or Cæsar! Which shall it be? Cæsar has much to say for himself. He has much to offer. He offers escape from the Cross. He offers self-pleasing. He offers pomp and splendor and prideful swagger. He offers careless laughter and the privilege of living your own life. But there is this tragic defect in his program. His gifts do not last. They soon change to dust and ashes. The power to which Pilate clung so tena-

ciously has slipped from his hands long centuries ago. Even while this power was his, it brought him no peace. Cæsar's gifts never satisfy. They are as powerless to enrich us as fairy gold. They are as useless for the slaking of our thirst as a draft of water from the sea.

On the other hand, if you choose Christ, you come face to face with the Cross. "He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." His passion is not getting but giving. He expects that to be your passion and mine. But those who forsake all receive all. And the wealth that He gives abides. This is true because He Himself abides. He is "the same yesterday, to-day and forever." Not only does He abide, but He forever meets our needs. He has come that we might have life and have it in abundance. "He satisfieth the longing soul." This He can do to-day and throughout eternity. "In His presence there is fullness of joy, at His right hand there are pleasures forevermore."

## XVI

### THE UNKEPT KEEPER

#### *Song of Solomon 1:6*

"They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

The text is at once a confession and an apology. Not only is it a confession, but it is a confession with a sob in it. This young lover acknowledges that however fair she is, she is not so fair as she might have been. She realizes that she has not fully arrived. She is conscious of the fact that she is not so winsome as she might have been. Therefore there is a touch of tears in her voice as she tells us the secret of her failure. She has been so busy that she has been forced to neglect herself. "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

Now it is not my purpose to interpret this passage in the light of the context. I rather give it a wider and a more spiritual meaning. As such it becomes of profound importance to every Christian worker. As such it ought to be the constant companion of every diligent office bearer in the Church. Every active Sunday-school teacher ought to keep house with this text morning, noon, and night. Every busy pastor ought to hang it not only upon the walls of his study but within the chamber of his heart.

There are many of us that are genuinely disappointed in our Christian lives. We have fallen distressingly short of our ideals. We realize keenly that we are

wanting in that fine fragrance and charm that belong to those who dwell much in the presence of the King. We are conscious of a lack of power. We work, but little is accomplished. We toil, but see small results. We try hard to fight the good fight, but sin seems little afraid in our presence. What is the explanation? It is altogether possible that we could state it in the words of the text: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

## I

What is the secret of this type of failure?

First, it is not positive and aggressive sin. Of course sin always means failure. It always means utter loss and defeat. Every man who is making the weakest effort toward right living recognizes this fact. It is purity alone that is strong. No man was able to stand before Samson so long as he was loyal to God. But when he had broken his vow, his days of victory were over. "I will go out and shake myself as at other times before." You can see that there was a time when all that was necessary for him to do in order to win the victory was to shake himself. But this time he did not win. He was miserably defeated. Why the difference? He had lost his grip of God. Sin robs us of our power. It cuts the thews of our strength. It makes the victory that we might have won an utter impossibility. But that is not the secret of this failure.

Neither was this failure born of idleness. Now idleness is an exceedingly fruitful source of disaster. I think it is safe to say that it is the most fruitful. That is, more people who have begun the Christian life fail through idleness, through the shirking of their responsi-

bilities, than for any other reason. It is a great help toward a holy life to have something to do. The Christian who does nothing is certainly doomed. The house that remains empty is sure to have a tenant very soon.

The truth of the matter is that while one may be active and yet not a Christian, no man can be a Christian and be an idler. If you are shirking your responsibilities, if you are allowing the call of the world's needs to ring in your ears and are making no response, then you are headed in the wrong direction. If you are doing nothing to heal the open sore of the world, then that in itself is enough to prove your undoing. You are a debtor. This is true whether you have ever accepted Christ or not. This is true whether you are in the Church or out of it. To refuse to pay your debt is to insure failure.

We tend to forget this important truth. We are accustomed to think that men are lost simply because they do wrong. Now there are those who are lost through positive wrongdoing. But there are yet more who are lost through sheer uselessness. How many such there are. They are decent as decency. They are as respectable as respectability. They have only one thing against them, they are useless. They are not haters of their kind. They are well-wishers. But they are not well-doers. Therefore, if they were to slip out of the world they would hardly be missed. They are taking one of the surest of all sure roads to ruin, the road of doing nothing at all.

But this failure is a worker. In fact this is the type of failure that is born of being too busy. "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." Why? "I have been so busy toiling in the vineyards of others. I have been

so earnest and enthusiastic in bringing others to Jesus Christ, that I have lost touch with Him myself. I have been so diligent in cultivating the flowers of the Spirit in the gardens of others that I have allowed my own to grow up in weeds."

While I was a student at Harvard, I knew a bright young fellow who was much in demand as a coach. He hurried from man to man and from group to group. He gained what seemed to me a small fortune through his excessive work. How many he enabled to get through their examinations that would have otherwise failed, it is impossible to say. But this I do know, that he was so busy coaching others that he failed to take time to coach himself. Hence he failed on his own examinations. And I have known Christian workers to get so busy doing a thousand and one good things that they sadly neglected the culture of their own spiritual lives. This is the type of failure against which we are warned in the text.

## II

Now this temptation has always dogged the steps of toiling saints. But it is more pressing than ever to-day. This is true for the following reasons:

1. This is a type of failure that appeals very strongly to the modern mind. It has a fine show of unselfishness about it. It seems rather plausible to get so concerned with the needs of your brother that you utterly forget your own. To be keenly concerned about your own personal salvation is not looked upon with favor in many quarters. Such an attitude is characterized as glorified selfishness. We rather approve the man who is so busy that he seems to have utterly forgotten that

he has a soul. Therefore the spirit of the age makes it easy to become so busy working for Christ that we oftentimes forget Christ Himself.

2. Then this temptation is very pressing to-day because there is so much to be done. The machinery of the Church has been greatly multiplied. We are in constant danger of becoming slaves to our many organizations. This is especially true of the modern pastor. There are so many groups to be met. There are so many committees upon which he must serve. There are so many banquets to attend. He is in danger of sowing himself broadcast.

This same danger in some measure threatened the Apostles. They found that they had undertaken too much. They found that they were getting off the main line. Therefore they called the multitude together and said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, that we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

They turned the serving of tables over to others, not because they thought the task was beneath their dignity. They did so because they were already engaged. They already had a task big enough to demand all their energies. "We will give ourselves," said they, "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." It was thus that they prevented a breach in the early church. It was thus also that they saved themselves from spiritual impoverishment.

We of to-day are in sore need of their wisdom. They no more needed to give themselves to prayer than do we. Prayer is communion with God. It is speaking

to Him and giving Him a chance to speak to us. The man that would speak for God must take time to listen. "I will incline mine ear," said a wise saint of old. "Thou hast given me the tongue of him that has taught that I might know how to speak the word in season to him that is weary." We know too little of that fine art, because we have so little time to listen.

## III

Wherein does the busy man fail?

1. He fails in his own spiritual life. We realize that our friendships one with another must be kept in repair. In order for you to lose your friend, it is not necessary that you do him an injury. It is not necessary that you write him an insulting letter. It is not even necessary that you make him a loan. The surest way to lose your friend is to neglect him. Never seek his fellowship, never write him, and little by little you will cease to be friends.

Some months ago I was the commencement speaker at a college for young women. It so happened that many of these girls were leaving on the same train that I was. Therefore, I saw them tell each other good-by. How they clung to each other. How bountifully many of them wept! How they were going to miss each other! But, to me, one of the saddest thoughts suggested by the scene was, not the empty days ahead when they would long for each other, but the days when through neglect of their friendships, they would utterly forget each other. Some day they may meet again. If so, most of them will meet under different skies and with the realization that they have grown out of each other's lives.

If this is true in our relation one with the other, it is equally true in our relation to Jesus Christ. He has called us into the high privilege of friendship with Himself. "I call you no more servants, but friends." But this friendship must also be kept in constant repair. This is only done at the cost of time and effort. It is altogether easy to become so busy commending the Waters of Life to others that you fail to drink thereof yourself. It is altogether easy to be greatly taken up with the doing of good things and yet lose out of your own heart the sense of the living Christ.

Then the neglect of your own vineyard makes for spiritual impoverishment because no amount of work can save us. The elder son was a diligent worker but he was not for that reason approved. When Jesus gave us a glimpse of the Judgment, He declared that there would be present those who would say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out demons, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?" And the answer to that question will not be a denial. The works will be admitted. But in spite of that fact, the answer will be this, "I never knew you."

When John Knox lay on his deathbed he was heard to groan as if he were passing through some terrible paroxysm of pain. The attendants thought that he must be dying. But by and by his groaning ceased. He then gave an explanation of his agony: "I have formerly, during this frail life, sustained many contests, and many assaults of Satan; but at present he hath assailed me most fearfully, and put forth all his strength to devour and make an end of me at once. Often before has he placed my sins before my eyes, often tempted me to despair, often endeavored to ensnare me by the al-

lurements of the world; but these weapons were broken by the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and the enemy failed. Now he has attacked me in another way; the cunning serpent has labored to persuade me that I have merited heaven and eternal blessedness by the faithful discharge of my ministry. But blessed be God, who has enabled me to beat down and quench this fiery dart, by suggesting to me such passages of Scripture as these—‘What hast thou that thou hast not received?—By the grace of God I am what I am.—Not I, but the grace of God in me.’ Upon this, as one vanquished, he left me.”

2. Then this program is a failure because it does not reach the desired goal. To keep the vineyards of others is a very worthy and noble ambition. But we must realize that, other things being equal, the measure of our power to keep the vineyard of another is the measure of the thoroughness with which, through grace, we have kept our own. I recognize the fact that God sometimes uses an unholy man for the doing of a holy task. But that does not do away with this fundamental truth:—There can be no really great doing without a corresponding being. The surest way to do better is to begin by being better.

How much of our failure to keep the vineyards of others has this as its cause, that we have not rightly kept our own! For this reason many of us, though very active, are ineffective. I have in mind a woman who once belonged to my church. She was one of the most tireless and energetic workers that I have ever known. She stood ready to do any service for which she was called. But again and again I saw her spoil everything by some display of un-Christian temper before the task was over. In spite of all her diligence, I

felt again and again that our church would be better off if she were to move to Timbuktu.

Even Paul was afraid that he might lose his usefulness. Therefore he said, "I keep unto my body and bring it into subjection lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." A castaway! We know what that is. I passed through a field the other day. I noticed a mowing machine standing out in the weather, rusting and rotting away. What was the matter? It was no longer of use. It had been cast away. Paul was afraid of that. He was afraid that he might become savorless salt. Therefore he gave diligence to the keeping of his own vineyard. Thus he saved both himself and those that heard him.

#### IV

How then may we avoid this type of failure?

The remedy is not idleness. We are not to quit working. The busy man will not be cured by losing all interest in the vineyard of others. It is both wise and necessary for us to be interested in the welfare of others. The second question that God ever asked is this: "Where is thy brother?" The reply of Cain indicated that he thought that his brother's welfare was none of his business. Therefore his name has come down to us black with infamy and red with blood. To be idle and indifferent can never cure any evil. These are profound evils in themselves.

What then, I repeat, is the remedy? It is to keep the scriptural order. While God asked, "Where is thy brother?" His first question is this, "Where art thou?" Simon is to strengthen his brethren, but only after he himself has been converted. We are to give and to

give freely, but only after we have received. The order of God's promise to Abraham is the order of his promise to us. He did not say, "Thou shalt be a blessing and I will bless thee," but "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." The promise that looked toward Pentacost was not, "Ye shall be witnesses and thus receive the Holy Spirit," but "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses." That is, we are to put rightness with God as our first and supreme duty and privilege.

This is what Jesus meant by those rather perplexing words to the Seventy. They had just returned from an evangelistic tour. They had met with great success. Because of their marvelous success, they were exultant with joy. "Master," they say with glowing enthusiasm, "even the demons are subject unto us through Thy name." And what answer did Jesus make? He did not give the answer that they expected. "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Now I do not take it that He forbids us to rejoice over the success that attends our labors. He rather means that we are not to misplace our emphasis. We are not to get so taken up with the effect that we forget the cause. To cast out demons is a great privilege. But to have our names written in heaven is something greater still. This is true because, as another has pointed out, character is greater than gifts. It is because right standing with God is greater than deeds. Without this right standing, we tend to fail in our service. Without it, we also fail in our own personal salvation. But if we put rightness with God first, then we make sure not simply our own salvation, but our use-

fulness as well. We do not lessen our efforts, but we make them more effective. Therefore, the most important step toward the keeping of the vineyards of others is the right keeping of our own.







